TABLE OF CONTENTS
Book Reviews, PGR 2002

142 The Lotus Flower: Beauty or Pain
    Heather White
145 Aliens Play Baseball; And Win!?!           Shawn Simpson
148 A Buck on Forty-Six:
    A Chance for Life
    Shebley Browne
151 Fitzgerald Did It Without Basics          Drew Clowser
154 A Day in the Movies: a Book of Film       Lucas Fornace
156 Why Is This Guy So Passe?                  Sean Kiehn
157 The Mystery of Romance                   Matt Neff
160 The Simplicity of Death: Without          Jacqueline Kerkhove
166 Political Freedom                        Clancy Cole
179 They Believed What?                       Lisa Macdonald
182 Yellow: Living in Black and White         Beth Truso
185 Leaving the Takers: Why the Gods          Jeremy Burch
    are Gunning for You
187 Simple Directions                         Stephen Kok
191 Prison=Rehabilitation?                    Jake Whitelaw
196 Love and Gangrene in the                  John Sargent
    Surreal Wilderness
198 Jumping off a Moving Bus                  Jason Shuffler
How do you feel about your body? When I look at myself in the mirror, I tend to compare myself to what society calls the “perfect woman”. You all know her, she’s five foot ten, has perfect skin and you can find her on the cover of any magazine; and that’s how I want to look. In comparing myself to the “perfect woman” I have managed to completely destroy my mind and body—with obsessive dieting and exercising—just so that I could conform to what society wanted me to look like. This is similar to how Chinese woman conformed to society by binding their feet. Our culture today focuses on the physical beauty as being erotic and powerful, in the same way that the Chinese found the “beauty” of foots binding to be erotic and powerful. Throughout Wang Ping’s, non-fiction novel’Aching for beauty, she portrays footbinding as a way for Chinese women to gain beauty, sexual desire, money and power. Although this book is educational it is overly academic and tough for the uninformed reader to understand. Aching for Beauty, demonstrates the effect that footbinding had on culture, politics and economics of China. The book is educational for seeing how footbinding became a huge taboo full of erotic pleasure. Although educational I found that Aching for beauty condensed too much information in to one book making the book difficult to understand. I think that this book would be better for the general public to read if it was broken down in to several books; one on the history, erotic pleasure and then Politics.

Footbinding occurred during the late imperial China. Footbinding is a process of self-mutilation that takes three years to complete. “A pair of perfectly bound feet must meet seven qualifications-small, slim, pointed, arched, fragrant, soft, and straight- in order to become a piece of art, an object of erotic desire” (3). Chinese men considered these bound feet, despite the broken bones and rotting flesh erotic. The foot was intentionally manipulated to resemble both female and male genitalia. “Outside, a bound foot is erect and pointed like a penis; inside it is creased and curved like a vagina.” (55)

Men of ancient china found the bound feet erotic. They would search though out China looking for the perfect “lotus foot”; the one that met all the qualification listed above. “ Bound feet served as the symbol
of eroticism, the object desire” (57) These men would hire them as concubines or maids; some would spend all there money just to be with the perfect””lotus foot”.

Twin red shoes, less then three inches, / With pretty flowers for embroidery. / Wait till I tell the folks at home; / I’ll mortgage the home, give up the land, / And wed with tinny feet as planned. (55)
This example show how far one man would go in order to marry the “lotus foot”. One would give anything to be a perfect person. Men felt that having women with perfect feet improved their life and, in-turn society would look upon them better.

Men would use footbinding as a form to control women. The women would have such tiny feet that they would spend all day in there chamber, making shoes or doing other art work. Once their feet were perfectly bound they could no longer do manual labor leaving the work up to the men.

“As masculinity turned more contemplative, refined, artistic, and sedentary, the ideal of femininity was upheld by the delicate and weak beauty who was also very refined and artistic” (49). Men thought that women needed to be controlled weather sexually or economically.”“Ximen ties Jilian’s feet to the post of the grape arbor. The act suggests that Jinlian has become part of the fruit, ripe and available to be plucked and eaten”. (The phrase plucked and eaten refers to having sex.)

The art of footbinding became a way for women to advance their economic status as well as make money. Women who had beautifully bound feet became prostitutes in-order to make money.

All the facades of the wine shops in the capital are decorated with the colorful ribbons and flags. When one enters the shop and walks about a hundred steps, there is a yard with small rooms lined along the south and north. In the evening lights are lit everywhere. Hundreds of prostitutes with heavy make-up stand along the main corridor waiting for the call of customers. They all look like fairies. (59)

As some women choose prostitution there were others who would bind their feet in order to marry in to a higher economic class. These women would better themselves and their economic status just by the size of their feet.

Women throughout history have disfigured their bodies in order to improve their economic status. Similarly men have often found the disfiguration of women erotic. We face this same problem in our world today. We may not say that we are as extreme as the Chinese were with their footbinding but I disagree. We kill ourselves by not eating, and enhancing what we don’t have, all to better our economic status or to be desired by men. This book Aching for Beauty, shows us that our society is quite similar to that of ancient China. We still use beauty to gain sexual desire, money and power.
It’s the top of the 7th the Cards last chance to break a tie with the Cats. There are runs on the corners and two outs. I am calling balls and strikes for this game. The batter hits a shot down the right field line. It’s tailing foul. Chalk, it hit the calk, Fair Ball! I make my signal as the right fielder throws in the ball. As the catcher and I set up for the next pitch I hear a cry from the Cats’ fans “Hey Blue you blow it, that was a foul ball, it hit the line!” I laugh with the catcher for we both know that if it hit the line it was a fair ball.

As a baseball umpire I have a very special view of the game of baseball. Greg Mitchell, the author of Joy in Mudville, shares with us his view of baseball and one very special season as the manager of his son’s team. Joy in Mudville provides us with a look into what baseball is and how it should be. Mitchell does an excellent job in blending the story of a wonderful season into the current state of affairs in baseball. He shows us that even if there are a select few who take baseball too far and cause problems within their community and the nation, there will always be the joyous season like the one the Aliens had and that is the reason baseball will live forever.

When I was younger I played baseball until the age of 17, but even before then I was doing much more than playing. At the young age of 12 I was the equipment manager for the team my mom coached and brother and sister played for. I helped, in one form or another, on my brother’s teams for the next five years. That’s how I became an umpire.

At one of the practices our team was going to scrimmage another team. The coaches wanted to have an umpire and asked me to do it. I downed the old raggedy catchers gear and went behind the plate to call my first game; even if it really didn’t count. At the end of the practice the coach from the other team, who happened to be the umpire assigner for the league, asked me if I wanted to ump for real. Of course I did it was fun. So at the tender age of 16 I was a real live Little League® umpire.

Mitchell’s childhood was similar to many young boys who grow up in America. During the spring and summer playing baseball in the
yard or street with siblings and neighbors. However he did not get the chance to play organized baseball. Not playing baseball as a kid left a longing in Mitchell’s heart that he is able to fulfill as the coach of his son, Andy’s team. A “Joy” that inspired him to retell the story of one faithful season in 1997.

The “’95 White Sox,” as my dad calls them, were the league champions. I was one of the assistant coaches along with him. My brother was the star shortstop, pitcher, second baseman, lead-off batter, you name it, he did it. Our collection of baseball players was that of the Aliens in Joy in Mudville. The Sox had Luke who, like RBI Keiser, always seemed to come up with an RBI when we needed one. Mike White was the Sox’s Enrique who, as a catcher, saved many a game for their team. And of course the team leader and star for the Sox’s was Nick, just as Andy played that role for the Aliens. My father like Mitchell will not soon forget how their team won it all. And myself no matter how insignificant my contribution to that team was it will still be an import part of my baseball life.

Today I live for the baseball season. Sure there are leagues around all winter, which I could umpire for but there’s nothing like doing 9 games in one week. When I take the field as each and every game there is a million things I think about but none of them are of like one of the stories that Mitchell describes in Joy in Mudville.

In East St. Louis, Illinois, a coach, angered by a call on a close play at the plate, rushed the ump with a bat and threatened to kill him, according to police reports. When other coaches intervened, he stormed off and returned with a handgun, stood about ten feet from the ump, and squeezed off a few rounds. Fortunately, all of the shots missed. The gunman was arrested. The ump was sixteen years old(169).

A number of years after I started umpiring there was a story of a coach chasing an umpire onto the top of a storage shied after a game. The ump was only a kid. When I take the field I am all too aware of these events, yet I do not even think about them.

I am not only an umpire for baseball but a fan as well. Mitchell recounts many great baseball stories through out the book. The way he integrates the stories — from attending games with Bruce Springsteen to taking Andy to Shea Stadium — with the tale of the Alien’s season made it hard to put the book down. I felt like I was in the sit next to Mitchell.

One of the first pro baseball games that I attended was at Candlestick Park. What I remember the most was the wave. We did not have the greatest seats, as a matter of fact there were in the middle of the upper deck. This, however, did give us a great view of the rest of the stands. Each time as the wave came around I could not wait for it to get there. Then as it past you would watch the other fans stand on the other
side of the stadium. I am sure there was a baseball game going on but at the moment I was counting the number of times (9) that the wave went around the stadium.

Mitchell’s season of victory is one that we all can connect with in one form or another. If you are a fan of baseball it won’t take you long to remember a story similar to one told by Mitchell. If you are not a fan of baseball Mitchell will thrill and delight you with his stories of baseball that will make you became a fan. Like my dream of becoming a high school varsity umpire, the Alien’s saw the completion of a dream in this book, and Mitchell has used it to say that the select few who may tarnish baseball’s image will not be able to kill it.

From Akira Kurosawa’s *One Wonderful Sunday*, 1947
The other day while I was waiting to purchase a carton of milk at the local 7-11, I couldn’t help but notice the woman in front of me holding up the line. She was painstakingly counting out the last few increments of coin necessary to purchase her lotto ticket, penny by penny. Upon closer inspection, I noted that her shoes were without laces, her clothes were quite rumpled, and her hair had not been combed that day. As she stood there, slowly counting her money while her hands shook uncontrollably, I wondered what fate had brought her to this very moment. It was easy for
me to offer up the last thirty-seven cents necessary for her to play the California dream, and yet I wasn’t prepared for the reaction I received. Instead of being grateful, this woman was mad—no, she was pissed off—and she swept my meager contribution off of the counter and flung it to the floor in one sudden burst of emotion. This was followed by a tirade of “I don’t need your help” and profanities galore tossed in for good measure. The clerk and I exchanged looks; mine silently apologizing for the scene I had just created, and his dismissing my apologies with a sad smile that let me know that this was not the first incident of this nature. Of course, now she had lost count, and once again I found myself thinking about her life as her pennies slid cent by cent from her grasp, across the counter and onto the clerks’ patient piles of ten. Finally the woman left, clinging onto her lotto ticket, and the hope that this one may be the one that changes her life.

The “American dream” can almost always be tied to financial freedom. If you are a gambler, one big hit, and your problems are over. In Louise Meriwether’s book, Daddy was a Number Runner, the desperate struggle to escape poverty by playing the numbers (an illegal sort-of lottery set up and run by the mob) is told as seen through the eyes of 12 year-old Francie Coffin. The story takes place in Harlem during the depression, and although it is fictional, Ms. Meriwether exposes the sad truths of ghetto life through her very genuine and often shocking writing style; forcing the reader to digest the content as an accurate account of what a life of extreme poverty was like during this time in history. With vivid descriptions such as, “Lord, but this hallway was funky, all of those Harlem smells bumping together. Garbage rotting in the dumbwaiter mingled with the smell of frying fish. Some drunk had vomited wine in one corner and peed in another…” (12), the reader is instantly transported to inner city Harlem. This is a story written to convey the overwhelming obstacles—the triumphs and failures—faced by both black men and women throughout history.

Within the title of the book is a metaphorical reference to the rigors of a life of poverty. It speaks of an entire class of people who are quite aware that the numbers game will almost always beat them down, yet collectively they hold onto the hope of “the big hit”, and are further encouraged by the few that do have the great fortune of hitting the right numbers. Francie’s father was a number runner, the middleman in charge of collecting bets and distributing the occasional payoff. It is with a great sense of pride that Francie describes her father’s position in the community, “Everybody likes an honest runner like Daddy who paid off promptly the same night of the hit. A number runner is something like Santa Claus and any day you hit the number is Christmas” (13). Ironically,
Francie’s admiration for her father is lost as the book progresses and the numbers take their toll on her family. Her father’s incessant gambling and multiple losses break his spirit. In his defense, after spending the family’s last few pennies on the game, Francie’s father states, “All I’m trying to do is hit a big one again... We almost had us twelve hundred dollars, baby. That’s all I’m trying to do. Hit us a big one” (76). Not long after this incident he stops coming home, and the reader comes to understand the damaging effects that loss of pride can have on a family.

Many of the hardships endured by Francie and her family are not uncommon with today’s ghetto life. Depicted in the story are horrible living conditions, uncooperative landlords, homelessness, sexual abuse and gang violence to name a few. Francie tells her story with a no-holds-barred approach, edged with the sweet innocence of a girl moving into womanhood. As a means of escape, Francie often goes to the movie theatre where she dreams of being swept away by the cowboy hero. In the beginning, he is a white actor, galloping to her rescue on a white horse. But towards the end, her hero’s skin becomes black and Francie realizes that her predicament is her own—and more importantly—is hers to change.

Although there is always the hope of hitting the numbers, Francie’s parents feel strongly about their children receiving a good education. It is the tool with which the youth can scoop themselves out of ghetto life. Francie herself knows the importance of a good education, but she finds it difficult to warrant support from her teachers due to their own racial bias. After turning in a project for her sewing class, Francie receives some gloomy advice from her teacher, “You might make a good seamstress one day. We have to be practical you know, there aren’t many jobs for Negroes... I don’t know why they teach other courses to just frustrate you people” (144). Once again, Francie is reminded that it will be up to her to change the life she has been born into.

The ending of this book comes quickly and is not by any means the ending of Francie’s story. Sitting on the stoop with one of her brothers and her friend Sukie, Francie laments over her life, “We was all poor and black, and apt to stay that way, and that was that” (208). By ending the story in this fashion, Louise Meriwether gives her readers the opportunity to think about the different options available to Francie. With the situation looking rather bleak, I desperately concocted a successful and happy future for the beloved main character, because this is the ending that she deserves. And yet I could not help but wonder if my beloved Francie would end up much like the woman that I encountered at 7-11, desperately gambling in hopes for a better chance at life. I found the ending to be frustrating and yet at the same time, I realized that the author had forced me to really take a look at black culture and think about the hardships faced by so many. In this sense, the end sets out to do exactly what the author had intended.
Fitzgerald Did It Without Basics:
A beginners guide book
for the advanced writer, not beginners
Drew Clowser

Fitzgerald Did It
By Meg Wolitzer

This is not a book for dummies. Fitzgerald Did It is directed at already accomplished writers who know how to write dialogue for screenplays. Assuming you can write and apply the book’s screenplay structure, it will carry you from there to expand your architecture of writing format, imagery, and movement of events to produce an excellent screenplay. This book’s an excellent tool for those with prior knowledge, but I would warn people with little experience, like myself, that the book doesn’t work for the amateur like it does for the master.

Because this is the first screenwriting book I’ve read I expected it to take me from start to finish. I gathered much about a structure to work toward, but I was left without guides to develop the craft of writing. Author Meg Wolitzer addresses the topic of structuring your ideas for dialogue in chapter seven and a little bit in chapter one. She used examples of her own script to highlight qualities missing in a poor script. She presented a three act structure in which to write your dialogue to form transition and introduce plots. One tactic mentioned was to observe other people to familiarize with speech and relationships. Develop brilliant one-liners for your characters to define the movie. Use personal experience to form a theme or plot in the story. Creating index cards filled in with key plots and climax events to organize the story line. These are some of the many tips Wolitzer suggests.

I was able to comprehend these methods, but I still didn’t know how to approach it myself. What would have been extremely useful is if Wolitzer would have provided some lessons or exercises. Instead of assuming that I already have knowledge to pick up from where the book starts, “...dialogue is the icing on the cake. It’s the part that you may already know how to do well” (Wolitzer 119). No, really I don’t know that well.

I visited the Internet looking for other reviews of Fitzgerald Did It and web sites providing more defined methods of starting dialogue. The majority of reviews stated this book was insufficient for lack of review in
writing technique. Anonymous reviewers on Amazon.com wrote: “…this one is intended for writers—particularly fiction writers and journalists—eager—to make the leap to screenwriting. Blessedly absent are the tedious lessons about how to write; in their stead is an explanation, almost, in unlearning how to write.”—“Wolitzer assumes that her readers are already accomplished writers and does not go into detail regarding character or dialogue development. Instead she concentrates on the special elements that set those topics apart from their prose…”—“Wolitzer focuses on translating the skills you already have to the specifics of the screenplay. Very helpful to aspiring screenwriters!” “These” reviews agreed that this book lacks the introduction to actual writing skills that a screenwriting book should have. But maybe she was expecting people to know the rundown of screenwriting before reading. I only think it would have been better if she had gone into depth on writing dialogue with the aid of exercises to benefit a larger range of readers. The way a textbook looks at its readers as new students to the subject.

I found a few helpful exercises on-line that could prove useful in a screenwriting book. Poewar.com offered advice such as: selecting an existing script and editing it to your own inclinations and desires before writing your own full-length script. How to monitor your own speech identifying that it is all right to write in incomplete sentences for dialogue. How to listen in on other people’s conversations to observe speech patterns and then to use your own conversations to write a small dialogue for practice. A writer should avoid crutches in dialogue, such as explaining everything they say through narration, rather use your narration to enhance the scene, not explain the dialogue. And practice writing a dialogue that everyone can understand. Let other people read it and give you feedback. This site was able to bring me closer to the process of writing with descriptions of exercises. Wolitzer had excellent advice with the brief commentary in the writing section. It would have been helpful to involve writing exercises to guide the reader in practicing the lessons given and point-by-point summaries to reiterate key advice.

Wolitzer’s key advice came well into play when she began her focus on organizing a screenplay. Subject most advanced writers would find useful in this book. She started off with the creation of a Treatment. Being the blueprint or short story of the screenplay. She would go on to explain the key elements in forming three acts, creating setups, conflicts, and resolution. Her knowledge of character description gave ideas to conform characters to scenes and scenes to characters within the three acts form. “Every” character occupies a scene society that involves other, complimentary characters”” (Wolitzer 108). She described how the first page or opening scene should be the catalyst to the film, relying on visuals.
to extend attention. A script should move forward, have motion, propulsion, and momentum—these—are all words that pertain to the action of a movie. The main body of Wolitzer’s book is prepping a scriptwriter to refine and finalize their work so that it is both professional and artistic. Many times the author would refer to a point in the future when you have your screenplay completed saying: “when you take your script to a studio” or “when you get ready to sell your piece” she is expecting her readers to be going the distance.

Author Meg Wolitzer is a novelist first, and a scriptwriter second, since she only has two scripts under her wing before writing this book. I consider her skill to be new founded and that her expectations with her readers are high in the comprehension of her book. A beginner at screenwriting will be able to attain a larger picture of how a script is put together and produced, but they will struggle to learn the craft of writing from the lack of exercises and technique if they choose to begin their learning from this book.

Works Cited


Temporarily dumbfounded by the unexpected, plot twisting ending, I gaze at the big screen while the credits scroll...best boy...what the hell is the best boy!? Did someone get married? And the gaffer? I used to have a friend we called Gaffney; hence my brain formed some sort of mental image when I saw the word, but not the right one—until now. Enlightened by a new appreciation for the art of filmmaking, I can tell you with a straight face that a gaffer is the chief electrician in a movie production. From where did I receive this life-changing, odd-term defining education you ask? Bernard F. Dick’s Anatomy of Film, of course.

Now in its fourth edition, Dick’s book has been around for almost twenty-five years, and I believe that its popularity can be attributed to the simple, user-friendly layout. The book reads like a friendly conversation, with casual language and images. What attracted me immediately was the author’s ability to write like he would probably speak; in other words, he comes off like an experienced writer, not trying to impress anyone with overly polished prose.
The book covers nearly all aspects of cinematography ranging from the different styles and techniques of the opening credits, to different types of camera angles with the appropriate times to use them. I found it fascinating how in depth and descriptive the author is when explaining such topics. For example, we learn that “deep focus” is a camera technique that is used when “the filmmaker decides that in a particular shot, foreground, middle ground, and background should be equally visible”. He adds that in *Citizen Kane*, “Orson Wells used deep focus for several reasons: to convey a greater sense of depth, to minimize the need to cut from one shot to another, and to bring out meaning that might otherwise not be apparent”. Adding another layer of credibility to the definition, the author goes on to give a specific example of the said film: “The classic deep-focus shot in [Citizen Kane] shows Mary Kane making arrangements with a banker who is to raise her son as a gentleman because she and her husband cannot. The position of the mother (foreground), banker and father (middle ground), and son (background, seen through the window blissfully playing in the snow) says infinitely more about the way young Kane’s life is being signed away without his knowledge than would be the case if the action had been broken down into four separate shots”.

The author uses this simple layout in order to define a new term or idea throughout the book: the definition of the term; followed by a figurative, general, or ideal example; and then a literal instance—such as with the—*Citizen Kane* example above. The author uses this format consistently with a myriad of examples from hundreds of films. This makes it very easy for someone, with little or no film expertise, to have an enjoyable read without getting lost or bored. The author borrows actual instances from anywhere from three to five movies to explain each new concept.

Geared for an introductory film class, the book’s primary audience is probably freshman or sophomore college students; however, the author uses examples archaic to this age bracket. Most of the examples that the author refers to are very old (1930’s to 1950’s), which sometimes makes it difficult for a young reader, such as myself, to relate to and visualize. I suppose the films from the golden era are probably easier to make references to because today’s films are more complicated both in story and visual effects. This is very similar to teaching the fundamentals of wine, where it is critical that simpler wines—wines that bear the characteristics of their variety—are introduced before the more complicated flights.

Although the majority of the films referenced in Dick’s book are classics, I must give him credit for the menu of recent movies all well—such as Sam Mendes’ *American Beauty* (1999), Daniel Myriak and Eduardo Sanchez’s *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000), Wolfgang Peterson’s *The Perfect Storm* (2000), Michael Bay’s *Pearl Harbor*
(2001), and many others. Having such recent additions as these incorporated into the text makes you feel like you are getting the most up to date information available.

Using both modern and classic examples, Dick’s newest book is an ideal instrument for anyone interested in the art of filmmaking. Be it a college freshman taking a first course in film appreciation, or a movie enthusiast wanting to broaden his motion picture knowledge, this book is a versatile and adequate tool. Because it introduces so many memories and pictures in to the brain, this book is very hard to put down; indeed a fine read for anyone curious of what goes on behind the silver screen.

Orson Welles, in a canted shot from Carol Reed’s *The Third Man*
In RED LOBSTER WHITE TRASH AND THE BLUE LAGOON, Joe Queenan demonstrates that he is the world’s most pompous ass and a hell of a funny writer. He simultaneously made me laugh out loud and want to wring his neck. His comments are really quite funny except for when he uses obscure and passe comparisons, which he does throughout the book. “...Cassidy selected the one female in the crowd who had no interest whatsoever in sharing the stage with David Cassidy. Like, he’s not Marky Mark.” I can’t remember the last time somebody used Marky Mark as an example of popular culture. This is a strong example of how Queenan does not have a firm grasp on popular culture. There is nothing wrong with this, as long as you are not writing a book on the subject. Although his humor and writing style are superb, he is attempting to dive into the bowls of America’s pop culture. Even with all his experience, he has gained little understanding of the subject matter.

Throughout my life, I’ve adopted a basic rule of thumb that any wisdom imputed to the denizen of Atlantis, Katmandu, or Machu Picchu must be viewed with extreme skepticism, because if these folks were so Goddamn smart, how come they didn’t hang around longer? Look at it this way: Pizarro invades Peru on Sunday, and by tuesday night he’s conquered a nation of 12 million people. How do you lose your entire continent to a couple hundred grungy conquistadors when the odds are that heavily in your favor? The obvious explanation: The Incas were a race of 12 million pre-Columbian Greg Normans.

When was the last time this guy picked up a history book? Doesn’t he realize that the Spanish had guns, steel, and the advantage of the Incas having deities that appeared similar to men on horses? The Incas thought the Spanish were godlike, and were therefore much less suspicious than they would have been had the invaders looked differently. I know he is trying to be funny, but if you are going to publish a book, it seems easy enough to not include something so utterly short-sighted and inaccurate. The basis for this book is that he is such a high and mighty intellectual; it
is humorous that a man of his standing would entangle himself in such mundane popular activities that the average American partakes in. Queenan can’t be as bright as he says he is if he doesn’t know such basic facts of history. On another note, who the hell is Greg Norman? I had to do a search on the internet to find out that he is some Austrian golfer. Who pays enough attention to golf to know what that end reference means? I think that this guy needs to rethink what is considered common knowledge.

Even as I express my irritation at this writer’s old, obscure references and misinformation, I still find that he really has a very funny and crisp writing style. For example, “I know that people who remember the Nazi book burning say that it is a crime against humanity to burn books, but I don’t think these people have read Donahue: My own Story.” I this statement isn’t that politically correct, but it’s quite humorous. These insights of Queenan’s are old or obscure about one third of the time, but the other two thirds are powerfully funny.

Overall this book was funny as all hell, but oh so frustrating with all of these reference that I just didn’t understand. I think that Queenan really ought to have done a little more research. His comprehension is only good to a point, and I don’t think he is in tune with what is popular today. His ability to cross over generations is severely limited by his excessive use of outdated information. I think this book was written for men in there 40s or 50s, and I would only recommend it to people of that generation.
**The Mystery of Romance**

*The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock’s Films*

Leslie Brill
Princeton University Press, 1988

*The Hitchcock Romance*, by Leslie Brill, is a review of Alfred Hitchcock’s career through studies of some of the various films spanning his career. For the Hitchcock fan, it is a must-read. The author gives penetrating insight into the films and seemingly has the ability to connect any part of one movie with any given part of another through symbolism, irony, or other devises distinctive to Hitchcock. She insists on referring only to Hitchcock in the figure of a director, not as a person, and is able to narrow the field somewhat to discussing just the range of his films and how he created and managed them (an enormous field just in itself). She speaks clearly for the reader’s benefit and divides her subjects well. Some of the information she presents reflects the conclusions of studies of other analysts, including a simplified framework of Northrop Frye’s study. The author does present her own ideas on his films and argue them efficiently, especially her assertion against Hitchcock’s optimistic view of the world.

Brill’s analysis of Hitchcock’s themes is especially detailed and intricate in her explanation of the movies and how they portray his thoughts as a director. She uses the film *North By Northwest* as her most notable example of a normal Hitchcock movie, stating, “Hitchcock’s career, I believe, can be understood in terms of the themes, underlying assumptions, and techniques that shape the central meaning of *North By Northwest*” (4). She goes on to identify these themes as the actions of “loss, search, and recovery” which “underlie all of Hitchcock’s films, albeit sometimes as dreadfully disappointed and mocked possibilities” (4). Brill holds this view throughout the entire book, never hesitating to prove her point when she has the chance. She also logically organizes the themes of the films she discusses, shifting gradually from more light-hearted films such as *The Thirty-nine Steps* and *Young and Innocent* gradually to darker tragic movies like *Psycho*, showing the full scope of the set simple themes. She covers Hitchcock’s use of irony thoroughly, but she differs from most experts of his career by denying that Hitchcock as a director took a primarily optimistic view of life and humanity. She insists that his career must be taken as a whole, and that some of his movies don’t fit the frame of a confidence in humanity. She suggests rather that his views are influenced more by “the Fall;” human nature is depraved and has to be shown as such. This is especially evident in *Psycho*, one of Hitchcock’s most well known films. She proposes that the entire premise of the film is that a person’s sins will inevitably be punished, no matter if they are
repentant or not. This is repeatedly emphasized in the consequences of the character’s actions. Marion repents of her theft too late, only to be murdered by Norman (the motel keeper) who has been in the process of self-punishment for almost a decade after he killed his mother. Even the detective became a victim after he committed less serious crimes such as trespassing and lies. Brill argues that this view of life becomes central to the interpretation of Hitchcock’s movies and his professional life.

The strongest part of this book is the author’s use of abundant detail and logical interpretation to analyze Hitchcock’s film vision. She affirms a remarkable coherence of all his works, in device and theme, just one of which is a cameo by the director in each of his films (symbolic in itself). In her examination of the film *North By Northwest*, Brill goes into lavish detail to support her ideas about Hitchcock’s themes. She idealizes
this particular movie as the standard of the typical Hitchcock romance, narrowing the definition to “the relatively fabulous kind of narrative that we associate with folklore and fairy tale and their literary and cinematic offspring” (5). She accurately points out a variety of meanings within the movie, ranging from an explanation of character actions to the deeper meanings and symbolisms Hitchcock films are known for. North By Northwest’s characters are the most typical of his movies. By following the main characters, Thornhill and Eve, almost nonstop through the movie, the audience can see who they are as they begin and how they develop. This is further accentuated by a typically outlandish series of events, which force the characters to make choices vital to either their future fall or happiness. She emphasizes the confusion that reigns symbolically in both their personal lives through devices such as a crowded train, railway terminal, and loading platform which the “heroes” must sort through before they can find themselves.

Hitchcock cannot be said to have written any films that deal purely with the relationship between a man and a woman. In fact, Brill asserts that this kind of heterosexual love is symbolic of a divine grace in most of his films, above a normal, almost miraculous in its existence. Brill asserts that there is a correlation between a character’s sexuality and their role in a movie. She says that in the majority of Hitchcock’s work, the villains show evidences of sexual perversity to contrast to the supposedly pure sexual thought of the hero or heroine. In North By Northwest, the villain, Van Damm’s butler, Leonard’s closeness to his boss indicates what she calls “an amorous relationship” between the two. She also identifies the hint of an incestuous link in the otherwise natural relationship between Van Damm and Eve. In contrast, Thornhill and Eve as the hero and heroine are drawn to each other, not totally free of faults as witnessed by their promiscuous and somewhat shallow character traits, however not perverted in their view of the world and nature.

As Hitchcock’s characters suffer their progression of fragmentation to resolution, the audience is made able to look on them from unique perspectives. The most notable example of an unrealistic perspective in North By Northwest is the famous bus stop scene. Thornhill’s desolate location cannot possibly be witnessed from the camera’s location. The elevation and panorama covered by the shot are symbolic of Thornhill’s present state; he can sink no lower in the movie at that point, and the camera allows the viewer look down on him alone in that desolate spot without any idea of what to do. Similar methods are used repeatedly in every Hitchcock movie, making his work known for the peculiarity of setting’s use in the intricacy of the story.
As advanced and enjoyable as this work is, it does have a few, mostly cosmetic drawbacks. Brill writes in extremely intellectual language, which makes it impossible for her work to be read as a simple overview to some of Hitchcock’s career devises or peculiarities. She supports her points well but sometimes manages to drown the reader in an immense amount of detail. She very rarely loses the focus, but sometimes the exegesis becomes a distraction and bogs down the higher level of interest with which her reader would otherwise approach her work. Brill, however, should be given credit for keeping the reader entertained in the midst of what a typical lay reader might put down right away as confusing or too scholarly. She is partially guilty of imparting the sensation of a college thesis or dissertation to her work (especially after she dedicates the book to her family and students). The topic is naturally dry anyway, but she leaves it to the reader to pick his own topic of interest and doesn’t include the him within her sphere of explanation, in part because of her resolve to only look at Hitchcock as the director behind the movies. For example, she will constantly assert Hitchcock’s personal views and beliefs but will not tell why he believes those things and used them in his films. The reader has no reason to stay involved in what she talks about unless they are Hitchcock fans already-part of the reason I liked it. The main weakness in her book is that it does not have a mass appeal. Most of this is the fault of the topic; a massive introspection on the career of even a famous filmmaker will not evoke interest in the majority of people. Brill, however, doesn’t do much to counteract the natural effects of the subject. Granted her purpose was to put together a thorough study of Hitchcock’s career as a film director, but she might have been able to become more personal with the reader during the course of the work.

The Hitchcock Romance is an excellently written study of the life of Hitchcock as the brilliant director behind the films. Lesley Brill presents uncommon, fresh perspectives on the intent and perspicacity behind his genius, and well proves each point with facts out of an abundance of his movies. She shows a true knowledge of his intellect and imparts her insights to the reader clearly and intelligently. Despite some topical difficulties, she manages to make her work interesting to the reader with a myriad of well-explained references to famous and loved Hitchcock films. Brill conveys to her readers a sense of how Hitchcock’s mind worked and created. Even divorced from his personal life, he was still a master storyteller with a gift for capturing both the joys and struggles of life in his films. The reason he has become so well loved and studied is because of that gift, and what he had to teach should not be lost. It is important to recognize greatness repeatedly; and that is why the book is successful—because it keeps one of the greatest filmmakers in history in the minds of both the new and old generations.
The Simplicity of Death: *Without*
Jacqueline Kerkhove

*Without*
Donald Hall
Houghton Mifflin, 1998

Donald Hall’s, *Without*, is a captivating book, giving his reader a unique insight, a window into the world in which he and his wife lived in. Guiding us through the hardships that Jane Kenyon and Donald Hall went through. Jane Kenyon died of leukemia, and Hall writes about their memories, and his loss. In the beginning of his book Hall writes as if it’s his own journal, expressing his thoughts, and experiences that he and his wife are going through while struggling in their fight against cancer. Then after her death he writes letters to her. By writing to his departed wife he continued to feel a connection with her. Although writing to someone who no longer is alive may seem absurd, it helped to get Donald Hall through his wife’s tragic death. Writing can help to heal many different wounds.

The point of publishing his experiences and thoughts was not to baffle his reader with complicated stanzas— making you look up every other word in the dictionary— but to expose his experiences and emotions to the world. In 1998 Jane Moore, the author of San Diego Reader, interviewed Donald Hall and he said,” I didn’t-couldn’t- image how I could live without writing a book. It was the only reason to get up in the morning. For a solid year, I worked on those letters every morning. That was the reason for being alive.”

The book isn’t completely about death, torment and distress, but about a powerful love between two poets, their memories, and their tragic separation. Hall quotes his wife, “ ‘Dying is simple,’ she said. ‘What’s worst is…the separation.’ ” (Hall 42). Hall offers a way to feel as though you are telling your departed loved one what’s been happening in your life, what you’re feeling, and how much you miss them. Reliving her death a thousand times, he writes to her with hope that his pain will cease. When he could not visit her gravestone, because of winter’s harsh snowfall, he would write to her worried that she would miss him.

This book is one I could not put down. You are drawn into their life together, their pain and their loss. You feel as though you are standing in the room with them, watching them gaze longingly into each other’s eyes. It doesn’t make you feel sad throughout the entire book, but takes you through every emotion, including sadness. You see their memories, their love. They are trying not to concentrate on fearing the loss of one another, but rather enjoy what they have now. In Judith Moore’s interview with Donald Hall he said, “What was the most beautiful thing in our marriage was when we weren’t aware that we were going to die. And we
just had our routine. You know you look back on it, and you think, ‘why wasn’t I more aware of how blissful that was?’ But if you’d been aware of how blissful it was you have been dreading losing it. Anybody who’s been through anything like this knows what I mean.”

The reader has to be proud of Donald Hall for revealing his life — the toughest and most vulnerable part of it— in a book, for anyone and everyone to see— which takes guts. Some might say that it is uncomfortable to be so personal with the author, but to me it is refreshing. Although it is a tragic tale, I feel as though I am a stronger and more grateful person for reading it. I have never lost someone close to me, but I feel that if I did, writing to them would be one of my first impulses —once I was no longer numb.

Donald Hall’s first letter to his wife, four weeks after she had died, speaks of her grave, and the pregnancy of their friend, and of his emptiness without her. “Your presence in this house/ is almost as enormous/ and painful as your absence” (Hall 51). I think this line really sums up how he feels— how anyone would feel. Capturing how radiant their presence was, and that by taking that away all seems lost.

Hall captures the truth lying behind the pain of knowing your loved one will die, and then losing them. He portrays these emotions in a unique way. First by describing their hardships of radiation, and chemo therapy, along with recapturing their memories, then expressing his love, and thoughts in letters to his departed wife. His words seemed like one of the most personal things an author could say. The letters to his wife were breath taking. He mentions how he relives moments of her death, “I keep my body before your large wide-open eyes/ that you do not blink or waver,/ in case they might finally see/—sitting beside you, attentive—/ the one who will close them” (Hall 54).

It is hard to adjust your life to the absence of a loved one. Remembering each morning when you wake up, that they are not there waiting for you to open your eyes. Hall experiences the brief illusion that Jane is still there with him.

I cannot discard
your jeans or lotions or T-shirts
I cannot disturb your tumbles of scarves and floppy hats.
Lost unfinished things remain on your desk, in your purse
or Shaker basket. Under a cushion
I discovered your silver thimble.
Today when the telephone rang
I thought it was you. (Hall 61)
This is not because someone is crazy, or obsessed and can’t let go, it’s because their love is not something he can throw away, or forget. And by throwing her things away it would mean throwing their life together away. Forgetting that she’s gone is not an easy thing to do, when you’ve
had someone there everyday for years. Although the way he structured the book was slightly confusing for me, it took nothing away from the meaning of his words.

When he starts the book I was slightly confused, he occasionally referred to himself in the second person, and I would have liked to know if he was writing down their life in a journal, or if these were things he wrote after her death. I enjoyed his letters to her tremendously. They were so honest, and personal. He writes his letters in a timeline, over one year referring to the seasons. Winter, spring, summer, fall, each one describing to her what the weather change has been like, along with many other more personal things.

I don’t think he made the beginning inconsistent because he wanted his reader to feel excluded, but rather to have his reader feel as lost and confused as he was. I think that he may have been writing down his thoughts as they came, not caring about structure, or finding the perfect word or phrase, but just raw emotions written in ink. I actually think that now after having stood back and just felt what the emotion of the book, I’ve grown to appreciate the flaws in it. Instead of analyzing it in terms of its structure, and critiquing it, I have raised a more intimate appreciation for it. It has flaws because life has flaws, it’s ups and downs. Life isn’t perfect, as we all know and things don’t always to according to plan. Hall didn’t have a path from A to Z, showing him what to feel, and how to put down what he felt into a book. He just wrote, and what came out was something that he could cherish because it is his voice as a writer. And as a reader I understand the chaos of the book, because his life was chaotic.

Anyone who has experienced a loss should read this book, and even if you haven’t it is refreshing and honest. It is a break from exaggeration, advertising, and empty words. Every word is an emotion, a tear, a drop of passion. I admired the healing power of writing to his wife, although you know that he will never completely be over his loss, you know that writing to her has helped to begin healing his pain. His writing is moving, and so is the power love.
Political Freedom

Clancy Cole

Mass Politics is a book for the political thinker. For a person who believes that there is a tie between our society’s politics and our popular culture. Mass Politics, which is written by a number of authors and edited by Daniel M. Shea, gives a strong claim to the fact that our culture has been going down hill because of our entertainment media.

I first stated reading this book because I thought that it would have something to do with the censorship laws in America-and it does’ yet it just does not get into the detail I was looking for. Mass Politics is a compilation of critical essays gathered and edited by Daniel M Shea. Each essay has something to do with the idea that because some form of entertainment has violence in it, it is that violence that has led to violence in our society.

The book is hard to read because of the essay format it seems to jump around from one authors point to another. After the reader reads an essay it would be good to just set the book down and forget the essay read. The reason for this is because the next essay probably won’t have anything to do with the previous essay, and the reader would not want to get confused.

The book touches such topics as gender politics in popular culture, race relations, entertainment and the politics of class, and popular culture and the decline of civil society. As a reader one can see that the book covers a lot of topics and being only 160 pages long, how could the book go into that much detail on such a wide spectrum of subjects?

The writing styles in the book change from one style to the next because it’s a different writer writing each essay. There are also a number of different opinions in the book for the same reason. Although most of the essays have something to do with the fact that the way we as a society spend our time leisurely we are taking in some form of politics, either on the television, sports, or in music, it is in these forms that our societies standards are declining. This would be the reason that our culture is also declining.

As you can see I am a little skeptical of this claim that our standards are declining because of how we as a society decide to relax. Is it not true that our art imitates our life, and experiences. Thus what we see on television is what we see in life. For example in the sixties when Vietnam was taking place did you not turn on the television and see a movie on war. How about just turning on the television or opening up a newspaper and reading about the war. This did not mean that we were going to war inside our own country, in fact quite the opposite. In our county at that time we were calling for peace, protesting the war. The editor goes on to prove this point by writing: “Many would argue that modes of
entertainment reflect values and beliefs. In other words, art is simply imitating life and by analyzing popular culture we get a bearing on society.”

The editor seems to do this a lot, that is contradict what he is trying to prove, he says one thing and then suggests that he could be wrong. For instance he writes about the tragedy that took place in Jonesboro, Arkansas with the two teenage boys who saw fit to shoot their classmates after pulling the fire alarm while hiding from the bushes, and how this is related to violence in the movies. He then goes on to depict a film called The Program, and in the film college football players are testing their masculinity by allowing a car to run over them. Than later contradicts himself by saying: “To many, the stimulus-action argument is a hard sell because even though there may be a link between entertainment and unwanted consequences, most people realize it is just a movie, song, or game, or advertisement. Few are anxious to let a Buick run over them because they saw it in a movie.” You see this is what I’m talking about why say one thing and then prove yourself wrong. Given that too make a good argument or claim you want to weigh out the pros and cons to a subject. But this kind of writing is not confident writing and makes the reader question what the writer is trying to prove weather it is that violence in movies is leading to violence in our culture, or to educate our people between the differences of reality and make believe.

I’m not saying I don’t agree or disagree with the author/editor of the book there may be a definite link between our cultures choice of it’s use of time, and its politics that may or may not be leading to the decline of our society. It is my job to say weather this book is worth reading or not. The way we spend our free time may or may not mold our expectations, attitudes, and views toward others. Within sports, music, literature, and almost every form of relaxation there are very powerful messages. Look at meditation for example one can have some huge realizations without any out side influence. It is in these ideas that may shape ones personality or identity, which add to the shaping of our political culture. However who is to say that it is just the political part that gets shaped. It could be spiritual or intellectual shaping that takes place.

I do agree that there should be a censorship on certain issues such as pornography in the nation, more specifically child pornography. A chapter that is very worth reading in the book is one by, Robert H. Bork, titled The Collapse of Popular Culture and the Case for Censorship. This essay dealing with censorship issues that I was looking for-Internet censorship. An Internet sight called <alt.sex.stories> tells stories about the kidnapping of two small children one a six-year-old boy, and the other a seven-year-old girl, the boy was castrated and then murdered, and the girl gang raped and murdered. The web sight gives instruction on how to make a bomb, where to find a girls school and the best time to kidnap a girl. The web sight also has 25,000 pictures of child porn, women eating feces, bestiality, snuff films (victim copulates and then is killed), suicides,
and much more that I won’t even discuss. This is the type of entertainment, (if you want to call it entertainment), that should be censored. This is the first time that we as a nation have encountered this kind of material, and it is because of technology.

The technology that we are seeing today such as the World Wide Web has brought around a lot of censorship issues. I don’t think that the founding fathers thought of this when they wrote the first amendment of the constitution, or J. S. Mill with his principles on liberalism. With the birth of the Internet and how fast information can be passed around how do we go about censoring so much information. The Internet spreads across the world, how are we to censor information from other countries? Now we have the wireless Internet too, we don’t even have the technology to change information once submitted to the wireless Internet. As in the past when we have censored, or ban something it seems to bring it into focus, causing attention to be brought upon the object that we are trying to take attention away from. Teenagers who are already at a rebellious stage in their lives have even more of a reason to buy or download this item, sometimes just to spite authority. I remember when I was a teenager; I used to buy music just because it had a parental advisor explicit lyrics sticker on the front.

The Romans had a great deal of technology they seemed to be ahead of their time with the construction of roads and the aqueduct, they had government and democracy, and it all came to a crash at one point. Then came the dark ages which was basically chaos, where men were killing each other for land and beliefs. Women had no rights they were basically property to be owned. What was owned had to be defended by power, there was no politics behind it. Kings ruled with an iron fists what ever the king said was the rule. People weren’t allowed to follow their own religion, and if they were part of a kingdom than the king owned all they owned. Is this what will happen to us if we let the morals of our country follow this technological pornography? We need to control somewhat, what the youth in our country is exposed to. Given violence is real, its on our streets and our kids should learn about it. But I think that how they learn about it is very important. I also think that the age at which people are allowed to make their own decisions should be respected. Basically teach our youth tradition, to uphold morals, and virtues, to educate certain things at the right time, basically teach them to be civil.

I don’t think that we should be ridiculous in censorship either; we don’t need to go as far back as the 1940’s and ‘50’s when the Hayes office censorship was prominent. Back then television would not allowed a husband and wife to be seen on a bed together unless one foot was on the ground.

Politics does not take place only in courtrooms, or state legislatures but in classrooms, churches, and movie theaters among just a few. This book does a fair job of convincing you of this claim. Yet it is hard for the average reader to read it straight through the provocative essays dealing
with race issues, censorship issues, pro-feminist issues, and political issues. If I were to prescribe this book to somebody it would have to be somebody who is looking for answers to ties between our media and politics, a person who believes that there‘is a tie between art and politics already. I think that the whole reason we live in a democracy is so that a person can have the liberty to decide what he or she wants to believe in, and to keep the state separate from the arts.

The point behind free time is that it is free to do with what we choose, weather one chooses to analyze a film or just watch the film, listen to music or read the lyrics, or read a book for that matter. All of these things are just what they are; a movie is just a movie; song just a song; and a book just a book, lets all remember that. I thought this book to be to choppy, and hard to read, but that’s just the point weather a person wants to read a book or not, think what they want to think, it’s their free time to think as freely as they choose.
Time for a bit of honesty—have you ever made the kind of decision that at the time you wish you could take back? If you are human, I can bet you have. We make life-altering decisions everyday, and sometimes without even realizing their impact. It’s utterly amazing to me how these choices of ours can help shape our character giving us a purpose and moreover changing our destiny.

The novel Unspoken written by Francine Rivers and inspired by a bible story illustrates a strong example of one woman’s life-altering decision. Fighting, passion, betrayal, romance, and murder, this book possesses what every worthwhile book should. This story takes place in the ancient times of Israel (around 1000 BC) in which there are many differences from our culture and our era as well. The author takes you back to this time and place with beautifully descriptive language. As I was reading the book I almost felt as if I was watching a movie in my mind.

Bathsheba lived in an age and province where women seemed of little significance compared to men. Women were not allowed to work outside of the home. Their responsibility was to maintain their home, meet the needs of their husband, and have many children. Women were talked about as if they were some sort of trophy, and the more children they bore for their husbands, the more prized they would become. Girls were between the ages of twelve and fourteen when they were arranged to be married. Bathsheba was no exception to this rule. She too was forced to be wed at a young age to a man she didn’t know. “Bathsheba’s father and grandfather accepted the bride-price from Uriah the Hittite, and all, in their minds, was settled.” (Rivers 22) Although she didn’t realize it yet, this common life was not one Bathsheba would lead.

In today’s world, if you don’t like your situation, you do something about
it. We have more freedom living in American in today’s time than ever before in history. You name it and we have resources for any type of problem. If you are unhappily married, you go to counseling, if that isn’t successful, you get divorced. If you are overweight, you find one of the thousands of diet programs that work for you, you exercise, and you lose weight. If you have a drug or alcohol addiction, you go to rehab, and you recover. We have free will to make these choices to help change our current circumstances.

Poor Bathsheba, she wasn’t so lucky. Not only did she lack resources, but also she couldn’t make her own choices; until one day when an opportunity presented itself. It wasn’t the best chance to take, in fact it was scandalous. Like playing with fire, this was very risky business, and someone was going to get burned. Following her heart and not her head, she went along with it. Bathsheba, living a life she didn’t choose, was so desperate in her circumstances that she did the unthinkable. For an innocent woman as herself would not have been the type to purposely hurt anyone. Yet she had been hurting herself for so long that she could not resist when this carrot dangled in front of her.

Although, most of this book is foreign to our culture, this particular main event illustrates a clear picture as to why Americans tend to get themselves into so much trouble. If it feels good, do it, right? Maybe we are so use to getting what we want when we want it that we have no sense of self-control. I’m not sure that the word “temptation” applies to us anymore, after all, we don’t contemplate, we just go for it, without a thought, at the expense of others and ourselves. For example, unprotected sex leads to unwanted pregnancy or abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, or at worst AIDS. Unfortunately, because of this attitude, our world has suffered greatly, and we are not invincible to the consequences of our actions.

“‘What have I done?’ She groaned her arms hugging herself as she rocked back and forth. ‘What have I done?’” (Rivers 71) In the aftermath, Bathsheba’s guilt seemed to be enough, but “karma” didn’t agree.

Consequence is the best teacher. For example, if a young child is told to run on the grass and not the asphalt, most likely they will not listen, but one good hard fall, and they will never run on the asphalt again! It’s the same concept with adult’s poor choices only on a much larger scale. Bathsheba faces one disappointment after the next. Not only do those who don’t know her treat her as a disgrace, but also her own family refuses to be associated with her. The last words Bathsheba’s mother said to her were “‘They will never look at you again. People will spit on the ground when you pass by. They will never speak your name aloud! They will curse the day of your birth!ÖÖÖYou are dead to me, dead to us all!’” (Rivers 83) It was evident that she made a very bad mistake, but I was rooting for her to get a break.

Yes, it’s true that if it doesn’t kill you it only makes you stronger. The trials we face test our character and teach us to persevere. Without rainy days, who can appreciate the sunshine?
Because of Bathsheba’s faith, she believed in a God of forgiveness, even though she had a difficult time forgiving herself. She was as patient as she could be through all of her pain. And then a ray of light peered through.

This woman, a commoner who was once rejected by all of society, ends up being truly loved by a King; and that is not all!! So if you are wondering how she beat the odds and became an honored woman in history, I advise you to read the book yourself!

Her life, a symbol of second chances, was inspiring and heart wrenching. I think we can all find a part of her within ourselves, the part that hangs on to hope for dear life.
Aftermath Of Germany
Edgar Calderon
book review on “The HotHouse”

“The Hothouse,” a novel that became known, more than what it was, once Wolfgang Koeppen, the author of the novel, died. Taking place in postwar Germany, Koeppen brings out the government, all the corruption that took place, and the struggles one goes through based on their surroundings. Before I begin to analyze, critique, and tell you a bit about “The Hothouse,” let me tell you a little bit about the author-Wolfgang Koeppen-which might make the novel a bit more understanding.

By giving the reader a background of the author, it gives more meaning to the book, it relates and connects characters to the author, and may introduce the topic of a novel, as does this one. Wolfgang Koeppen experienced what many people can only read about, and expresses it in “The Hothouse.” Koeppen lived during the Nazi era (1906-1996) yet fled from Germany to Holland to get away form all the havoc that was present, and then to Munich where he died.

After reading “The Hothouse,” the first thing that I said to myself was if Koeppen tried to express his feelings and actions through his characters. The reason I say this, is because I noticed that Keetenheuve, the main character of the story, went through similar situations as Koeppen did and he also lived during the same period. I don’t know why, but when I read through the story, I felt that Koeppen was trying to say, or get something out to the reader through Keetenheuve. I felt a sense of anger, fear, determination through the character and it reminded me of Koeppen. For example, in the novel, Keetenheuve leaves Germany due to similar reasons Koeppen left Germany. The two, Koeppen and Keetenheuve, didn’t have the same destination, yet they both had the same idea as why to leave Germany, being that they didn’t like what was going on with the government and how their actions were going to affect them. As I looked at the names of the characters, I noticed that they were different, yes they were German, but they had more meaning to them. For example, Elke was the name of one of the characters in the novel. Elke is a name of power and related to the government, which was mentioned in the novel. Here we see how Koeppen tries to show or express how Keetenheuve is surrounded and affected by the government and that it’s very difficult to get away from it. By doing this, I believe that it’s almost like a metaphor of Koeppen’s life.

Like any novel around, “The Hothouse” had its up’s and its down’s. After reading the book, I believe that the pro’s outweighed the con’s which made the novel a reasonable book to read. By this, I mean that there weren’t enough “wrong” or “awful” parts of the book to make me say that I didn’t enjoy reading it. If I were to pick three topics, subjects, or parts of the book that I disliked, I would have to say the following: you can say that the book is a little
cliché, at times the wording was a little hard to go along with (the flow was a little hard to go along with—the flow was absent at times), and I didn’t really like the ending of the book. I felt that the ending was going to be a little more exciting and not so dull, yet it’s a real life situation so that’s what makes it “real” and natural. Even though there were a couple of con’s in the novel, I enjoyed reading about how things were in post war Germany. Wolfgang Koeppen does a good job of showing how early Germany was and if you slept through that period in school where they explained this, you can get a quick lesson in “The Hothouse.”

The description in the novel was great due to the fact that Koeppen did see and experience the hard times in Germany. I felt that Koeppen did an excellent job in using metaphors and how he uses his characters to show how the government really was and how their actions were so harsh. An example of this is when Koeppen is talking about Keetenheuve and the trains or railroads. When I was reading the novel, Koeppen describes how the color of the train was a bright red which stands out. By using colors like red, this could resemble a metaphor of the color blood, which was seen by everyone around Germany at that time. The color red resembles fear, agony, and blood, and by making the trains red, it told a lot. The reason I say this, is because trains were everywhere and they are really hard to be avoided, just how people couldn’t avoid politics, the government, and the affects it took on them. Keetenheuve believed that he could change what was going on, yet it couldn’t be possible as he saw the republic crumble from all the corruption. Here we can relate Keetenheuve to the society. All the people who thought that it was just a phase that was going on and that everything was going to be ok lost hope when they realized how powerful the government really was. As I turned the pages and went further into the novel, I also realized or captured that the actions of one person affected the actions of another, how sex and drugs came into the story and the realism of it. As I read how a person would inhale substances to get high, how sex was being talked about, lesbianism and how it affected the man in the relationship as well the way society viewed it, are was Koeppen shows how life really was in Germany. I believe that the novel had so much detail and seemed “alive” due to the fact that it was being told by someone who did see reality in Germany, so it was as if it were being told first hand. For example, the characters make their decisions based on how society is, society is being run by the government which is powerful and dangerous, if the government is not stopped or slowed down chaos will occur, and we see all of this in the novel.

“The Hothouse” was an excellent book which shows the struggles and pain people went through in post war Germany. The novel shows this in its characters, the tone it’s written in and the era the novel took place in. The novel is very descriptive which makes it “real” and when reading a novel, I believe most people like to read reality and not bullshit.
Americanization
Nick Bassano

A book review of “The Right Thing to Do”

Cultural heritage is a major battleground in America. Within each culture is a fight to remain true to the traditions and customs that have been passed down through generations. These cultures are weakening here in America. A process known as Americanization is taking place and, in some families, it is causing much tension between the older generations, who place high value on old-world customs and traditions, and the younger generations, who are growing up trying to disassociate themselves with the older beliefs. This is clearly the problem facing the characters in this book.

The Right Thing to Do is a portrayal of a New York Italian family. A family struggle between the older generation portrayed by Nino, and the younger Americanized generation, represented by Gina. The writing is very easy to read and the set up to the story is well done. The trouble that I encountered in the beginning chapter was establishing who is who among this big Italian family. The author could have done a better job clearly pointing out who is related in which way to whom. This problem is clarified in subsequent chapters. Other than that problem the book read smoothly.

The major struggle between Gina and Nino comes when Nino finds out that Gina is seeing a man who is not Italian. This is Nino’s worst fear and he takes it as insult to his idea of what family life is and as an insult to his heritage. The book is about how a family can learn to live with new traditions and new ways of life that can disrupt what has been in place for generations. The father-daughter relationship is extended to a new degree while they battle over what is right and what is wrong. The father, Nino, wants to believe that the kids want a strong sense of heritage, and the kids argue that they are different from the older generation’s and their ‘set in their ways’ ideas. “What makes you sick”, said Nino, “is that you can’t admit you’re one of us.” (22). The struggle between the culture also takes a good look at gender roles in the setting of this Sicilian family showing what the old world father Nino expects and what Gina, his daughter, thinks about the dated traditions of a women’s role in the family. “That,” Vinnie said, “applies to men A man keeps his mouth shut to get on in the world. When a woman isn’t talking she has something to hide”. (23)
The writer does an excellent job of setting the tone between the two family members. The passionate views expressed by both parties are really written well. “Never do that again! If a wife can’t say anything positive about her husband, she shouldn’t say anything at all. You insult my dead sister, you encourage my daughter to rebel. You had better start behaving like my wife!” Nino’s voice full and low in its rage, hardened. “You’ve gone too far. You and Gina have gotten out of hand. It’s going to stop!” (27-28). I found myself taking sides in the story because I felt the emotions of each of the characters within the writing. A different reviewer of the book was quoted, “Hendin’s novelistic skill emerges in her portrait of the tyrannical father Nino—one of the memorable characters of recent fiction.” (Alix Kates Shulman). I also found myself marveling at how well the voice of Nino was written. His overbearing words beating at Gina with disapproval. “How can things be the same when you’re so entirely different? How can I stand by and watch you ruin everything through your stupidity?” (59).

I found this concept of losing cultural heritage similar to other books. Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club comes to mind. The Joy Luck Club is the Chinese version of The Right Thing to Do. They both deal with the same problems of losing cultural identity. The Joy Luck Club focuses on the mother-daughter relationship and The Right Thing to Do focuses on the father-daughter relationship. This theme is not relevant only to the Italian and Chinese who are living in America I would argue that every foreign culture whose roots are not deeply seeded in the USA are facing similar problems. Media that promotes uniformity among fashion, beliefs, and styles leaves little room for cultural influence on kids these days. A country that is one of the most culturally diverse is also helping to create a mixing pot of different cultures. This has been evident for a very long time when people were eager to leave their foreign traditions behind for new American identity. Only recently has a real sense of urgency to promote cultural awareness surfaced.

Throughout this book the father Nino is fighting to perseveres his idea of cultural identity. Through the great writing style by the author, this book was able to really show the fight to preserve an idea of cultural identity.
Urban legends grab you like the bloody hook stuck in to the side of your car. Jan Harold Brunvand, the nation’s proclaimed leader of deciphering whether or not your friend of a friend left his baby on the top of his speeding car, is showing the world the truth of the stories you heard around the office water cooler. These oral traditions of humor, horror and embarrassment have circled around the country faster than the hitchhiker you picked up could vanish. Brunvand collects these stories from around the world and prints them in The Choking Doberman. Although extremely fascinating upon first glance, in reading the entire composition I am taught—like a lesson from the book’s pages—not to believe the first story you hear. Dull writing, debatable and unresolved conclusions, and a tremendously repetitive depiction of these urban legends make intriguing word-of-mouth stories extraordinarily boring.

Jan Harold Brunvand alleges all the stories in The Choking Doberman to be untrue. But he offers only two faulty explanations to refute the validity of the collective stories.

Brunvand tediously repeats nearly identical legends throughout the book. Either printed in a newspaper or boldly pronounced as true at the last party he attended, Brunvand needlessly repeats each account. Widespread repetition becomes one of his foremost hypotheses for disproving the truth to each story. If the story was printed in England, Australia, and L.A. and consumed a small Midwest town, Brunvand believes it can’t be true. The Choking Doberman legend, printed six times with only slight differences between each, does nothing to support his attempts to unwrap the truth to these urban legends and makes the once interesting legend, mind numbing. And if reading every slight variation of The Choking Doberman legend wasn’t tedious enough, Brunvand describes every other story that might have some relation to
The Choking Doberman. Many of the legends he associates with The Choking Doberman are like comparing Romeo and Juliet to Saturday Night Fever because both leading men wore tight pants. Brunvand’s defective theory of repetition to reveal the truth solidly proves nothing and significantly bores the reader.

For example, one of the first circulations of The Choking Doberman legend is told as a woman arriving home from work finding her German Shepard choking on something. She rushes the dog to the animal hospital but upon arrival has to leave because of a date. When she arrives home, the vet calls her frantically declaring the mysterious object the dog was choking on were fingers. The cops come and find a burglar hiding in the house with two missing fingers. Brunvand then tells this story as he heard it happen in Las Vegas. He says the exact same story but this time the woman has to go home because the vet tells her to, not for a date. Brunvand tells the story again from L.A. The story is exactly the same, except this time the woman leaves the veterinarian’s office because it is busy. The Australian version of the Choking Doberman has an Alsatian dog and this time the burglar dies. And finally in the British version the descriptions are in a very British dialect and the fingers the dog were choking on were fingers of a black man. Brunvand fails to research these far reaching stories in any way to prove any one is wrong.

“How do you know that these stories you have collected did not really happen?” Brunvand answers this question he is so frequently asked by staying: “If you know that one of them is true, then please get me the proof; I’d be delighted to have it.” This is Brunvand’s other major point to ascertain the falsity of the stories he collects and prints. Like an oncologist asking the patient what the cure to cancer is, Brunvand, the expert of urban legends, expects us to find the answer. As well as not researching the material himself, Brunvand leaves the end of one chapter with six questions that he admittedly can’t answer. Like a pilot asking a passenger why the engine is on fire, experts shouldn’t admit their lack of knowledge in their field of expertise.

Brunvand provides no outside knowledge to prove the speciousness of each circulating story. Not once could he completely claim the falsity of any one story leaving the urban legend always open to the possibility that it was not a legend. I felt like I did more research at two in the morning on my History 17A paper. Annoyingly he drones on about each minor difference between the practically identical stories he knows. The Choking Doberman is stuck between a badly researched textbook and a supermarket tabloid. It proved nothing and wasn’t at all enjoyable.
They Believed What?
Lisa Macdonald

A bloody genocide in your homeland has forced you and everyone you’ve ever known to abandon your lives and take refuge in a foreign country. Soon after arriving you become sick, very sick, your stomach feels like it will burst. You are taken to a huge building then placed alone in a foul smelling room. You don’t speak the language and you wait for hours. Suddenly a crowd of people dressed in long white garments and blue masks descends upon you and begins to remove your clothes. You lie there too sick to move as they prod and examine your naked body. They pierce you with cold metal tools and you begin to realize they are sucking the blood from you veins. Someone’s forcing a foul substance down your throat, and it suddenly becomes harder and harder to stay awake. When you do regain consciousness there is a large wound on your stomach. The strangers hand you bottle with an unknown substance inside and then disappear. This is not an alien abduction, but it surely is a horror story and it is happening to people in our own country everyday. The victims? A group of Laotian refugees called the Hmong who are having Western medicine forced upon them. The violators? American doctors. You might be asking yourself how could this be happening here, and with our doctors? With her book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman the author helps us too understand how and why as well as a deeper message about how important it is to sometimes look through another’s eyes.

The book is an ethnography, a detailed study of a specific culture. The title refers to the rough Hmong translation for the disease epilepsy. The Lee family and their epileptic child Lia are the focus of the book. Chapters detailing the Hmong’s turbulent history as a people serve as smooth transition from one event in the Lee’s life to another. Fadiman’s style leaves you feeling very well informed without burying you in endless history. While *Spirit* is an excellent example of an extensive study, you don’t need to be an Anthropologist to enjoy it.

Early in the book the author sheds light on the true issue “… I got to know her family and her doctors, and after I realized how much I liked both sides and how hard it was to lay the blame at anyone’s door (though god knows I tried), I stopped phrasing the situation in such linear terms...” (3) I feel as though this statement sums up the real struggle of the story. Both sides had the best interest of the child at heart, but had little to no respect for the others point of view. It was because of this conflict that Lia’s care suffered greatly. One must wonder how American doctors, the same we trust to treat our own children and our selves, could have let this
happen. While both sides made the situation difficult, western culture made it impossible. The foreign Hmong where forced in to a strange and complicated world. Once there where here they had little or no chance to educate themselves. Very few Hmong spoke English, almost never adults, and so they where written off as ignorant. The native doctors had a responsibility to fill that cultural gap and to take in to account their patients beliefs, no matter how foreign. Sadly this was not the case.

The lack of communication stemmed from the fact that both cultures brought a strong sense of pride to the table. The Hmong’s deep sense of cultural pride was a societal defense mechanism that helped give the regularly displaced people a feeling of solidarity. The Western doctor’s pride was from a personal sense of status. Those perspectives when thrown together caused their narrow points of view to close completely. “Neil and Peggy [Lia’s American doctors] are easily the best pediatricians in the country, yet Lia’s parents didn’t hesitate to say no to them or modify the drug dosage or do things however they saw fit.”(53) This was never done with malice but only because the Lees felt as though it was their given right as parents to care for their child as their culture dictated. The sides fought endlessly and neither form of treatment was ever fully enacted. As a result Lia began having large damaging seizers that may have been preventable. No one ever realized the illiterate Lees couldn’t follow the doctor’s written instructions, even if they had wanted to. Yet the doctors and nurses at the American hospital saw their Loatian style of medicine as neglect. Without ever investigating they filled a child endangerment suit.

How could the parents of a patient and her doctors have such a huge misunderstanding? The reason was simply because no one had ever bothered to ask their feelings on the matter of their daughters illness. Several years later the author gave Lia’s doctors a run down on the Lee’s belief that the illness was caused by a bad spirit and missing soul. Their response to the information was “Mr. And Mrs. Lee thought what?” (261) The belief in spirits, or dabs is one of the largest and most basic beliefs of Hmong culture. The level of cultural ignorance the medical staff showed was disturbing. If someone were you patient for years one would hope the doctors would have at least a basic understanding of their beliefs. The level of assumption truly furthered the problem. “You’d say take a tablespoon of that. They’d say, ‘What’s a tablespoon?’ “(70) The author hammers the point home when she explains that the Hmong where a people who where deeply religious and believed that everything in the universe was sacred. Yet a medical chart once stated the following,
While the doctors only acted out of compassion and duty they went about it in a detrimental way. Western medicine failed Lia because of a total break down in communication, its insensitivity to cultural differences, and a lack of respect for patient’s beliefs. This is not the way it had to be. Western doctors respect Christian Scientist’s beliefs even if they don’t agree. We’ve become accustomed to them so they have been accepted. The Hmong where foreign and stereotyped as uncivilized, in turn their beliefs where ignored. *Spirit* is a book of great depth and presents an important lesson for all on the value of another’s perspective. Again Fadiman says it best, “It was true that if the Lees were still in Laos, Lia would probably have died before she was out of her infancy, from a prolonged bout of untreated status epilepticus. American medicine had both preserved her life and compromise it. I was unsure which had hurt her family more.” (258)

Daniel Bliss
No, we won’t be moving anytime soon—my Korean-Chinese-husband and I. As an interracial couple, we choose to remain here, in liberal Santa Cruz, a town not unlike the fictional one, Rosarita Bay, that Don Lee creates in his book *Yellow: stories*. Dave, my husband, has the luxury of being able to live in somewhat racial anonymity, despite the fact that his non-whiteness is written all over his Asiatic face. It is not that racism doesn’t exist here, or in Rosarita Bay, as it does everywhere; there is just less of it, and it’s harder to pinpoint. For the people, in all but three of Lee’s stories, being Asian is something that lends to the texture of their characters. It is in Lee’s title story in which the issue of racism is met most head on. The protagonist, Danny Kim, sees his life through tinted lenses, which color his world to what he perceives to be an unsavory hue—“yellow.” Lee’s quieter stories illuminate the subtle ways in which racism can insidiously creep into our lives, but it is with “Yellow” that he shows how it can poison a life.

As one watches TV or American-made movies, it is easy to see that there are very few roles for non-whites. Those that are available for minorities are based on stereotypes—like the South Park version of the Indian convenience store owner, or young black men as criminals and gang bangers. Lee seems to be addressing stereotyping of Asians by offering a variety of characters with three-dimensional personas. We see them as they are as the story is being told, and we get glimpses into their past which grounds them with a history. Familiarity can breed contempt but it more likely to breed empathy. Lee gives us lots of opportunity to develop empathy in his well-crafted short stories. His characters are approachable, and direct. I feel that they could be my neighbors, but perhaps that is because there are some many similarities between where they live and my town. Since there could not be just one version of the Asian-American experience Lee gives us: dueling poets, a craftsman who makes chairs worthy of museums, and two year long waiting lists; a surfer-
entrepreneur; a district attorney and his a drug addict client on trial for murder; and two brothers abandoned first by their mom, and then by their dad.

I was drawn to this book by its bright yellow dust jacket, blurry black and white photo of an Asian man, and the word yellow emblazoned across the front. My first impression was that the word ‘yellow’ was being used as a racial slur— the same way that some blacks use the word “nigga,” or the way that some homosexuals use the word “queer.” Words taken back from those who use them to offend, and take with them their inherent power. It wasn’t until the very last story did I see the word yellow could be used in a different context as well—cowardice.

The main character of the story “Yellow” is Danny Kim. As a teenager he wants nothing more than to fit in. He views his parents, who were born in Korea, with contempt, and himself with self-loathing. It is as if being born Asian is a gaping wound; all he can see and feel is this defect, so he keeps picking at it as it festers, and people around him take stabs at it, until the flaw is so huge it envelopes his whole being. He is a coward because he doesn’t stand up for his ideals, or to those who treat him with prejudice, and he hates himself for it. He goes through great lengths to avoid other Asians at his college because he lives in fear of even being associated with him. He considers them “insular” and “provincial” (Lee 221). He calls the students in the math department “geeks,” and cites them with perpetuating the stereotypes with which he so neatly labels them. Lee’s writing demonstrates how there is prejudice among minority groups, by showing there is no love lost between Kim and his fellow Asian classmates. They call him “banana”. “Yellow on the outside, white on the inside ” (Lee 221). Kim is unable to see that he judges other Asians in the same way that others judge him.

In this passage, Danny Kim tells of his frustration about being considered as an outsider despite all that he has done to try and sublimate. Lee writes, “He was born here, he spoke perfect English, he was mainstream as anyone could be. Yet, in this country of immigrants, Danny, as an Asian, was always regarded as a foreigner, a newcomer, someone who was not a real American” (Lee 249).

When my husband, Dave, was a teenager cruising around LA, his friends took turns making disparaging remarks about different ethnic groups as they passed through different neighborhoods. But it wasn’t until one made a comment about how Asian drivers were the worst that they realized they might have just offended their Korean friend. They turned to him and said, “Oh, not you Dave, you’re different” (Sunoo). What was different about Dave was that they knew him, had grown up with him before they had learned about prejudice from society and the media. What was “different” about Dave was he not the nameless stranger in the car
ahead; the guy standing on the corner as they whizzed by at 40 miles an hour.

At first he didn’t understand what they were talking about; it was the first time that Dave saw himself as different – something other than one of the gang. Then he realized that this type of prejudice had nothing to do with whom people really are—only what they look like, and as expressions of their culture. ‘It made me aware of the separation people create between themselves and others. I was forced to see the illusion of racism— to look some one fully in the face and blindly stereotype them. I forgave them [his friends] in the moment because I saw it was their weakness’ (Sunoo). There are times when an incident can define who you are, and other times where it can define who those around you are. For Dave, it was the latter.

The “difference” between Dave and Danny Kim was that David was able to see through the social conditioning that make people respond without thinking or, where as, Kim used every slight to further separate himself from others, and from his true self. In the story he asks his wife if she denies racism exists, she responds, “…the thought of it’s taken over your life, it’s poisoned you, and that’s sadder than anything anyone could ever say or do to you. Don’t you see? Racism’s not the problem. It’s you. You’ve got no heart, Daniel. You’ve got no soul ” (Lee 249).

Lee creates a fictional town, Rosarita Bay, where his interesting casts of characters live their lives as people first— Asian-Americans secondly. By creating a variety of sympathetic characters he assuages stereotyping and racism in a quiet—not-in-your-face kind of way— a stark contrast to the bold title. Yellow: stories is a worthwhile read as it helps to deepen our level of understanding, and empathy of what it is like to live in the States as an Asian-American, while at the same time not belying the complex nature of racism, and prejudice existing here today.
Leaving the Takers:
Why the gods are gunning for you
Jeremy Burch

“TEACHER SEEKS PUPIL. Must have an earnest desire to save the world. Apply in person” (4). Now, settle down; this isn’t another one of those hug-a-cactus, luv-thy-poodle, spirit-crystals crap. Well, maybe just a little. Remember, open-mindedness is the key here, folks. And open-mindedness is all that Daniel Quinn asks for in his award-winning novel, *Ishmael*; that and an earnest desire to save the world, of course. In what has become a cult classic, translated into over 20 languages world-wide, and a staple in many U.S. high schools and universities, *Ishmael* gives us a whole new perspective on the oft-pondered Man vs. Nature motif that has been the quandary for many an artist and scientist alike for centuries. Coming from what appears to be a genuine fear of the planet’s eminent destruction, Quinn draws upon this basic premise to warn us of the terribly unpleasant consequences threatening to befall mankind; that is, if we refuse to heed the warnings of our dying planet. And from what he would have us believe, it could end up looking something like that suped-up train in *Back to the Future III*—out of tracks, and nowhere to go but down.

Using a telepathic Gorilla named Ishmael, who takes on a human apprentice to incorporate his teachings, Quinn systematically guides the reader through his ingenious and sometimes shocking philosophical interpretations of some of our most beloved ideologies. Through the use of stories and easily understood imageries, *Ishmael* gently, but methodically, pushes the reader to look beyond the ingrained assumptions purported by “Mother Culture,” which (he claims) Western societies for centuries have continued to blindly follow without any real thought as to why. Unlike some writers of the genre, Quinn doesn’t opt for the deep, brain-draining symbolism and multilevel meanings that tend to leave one feeling like an incompetent boob. Instead, he employs an elegant simplicity and uncomplicated story line to explain his equally simple theories. Not only does this method add to Quinn’s credibility as someone who just might actually know what he’s talking about, but he does the reader (and his wallet) a service by making his ideas easier to assimilate, and as a result, more accessible to the general public.

Using the “voice” of Ishmael to explain his philosophy, Quinn sets out dividing the entire human experience into that of “Takers” and “Leavers.” According to his interpretations, all human beings originated from a Leaver lineage, which is to say they were of the hunter-
gather variety who lived in equal contest with every other creature on the planet. All this changed, however, when about 10,000 years ago humans began to break away from this centuries-old method in favor of agriculture and a more stationary lifestyle. Quinn (as well as many anthropologists) sees this as the turning point in which man first began to take a formal, and ecologically unhealthy, control over his environment. Calling the people of these newly formed settlements, Takers, he goes on to explain how their unchecked increase in population, the direct result of an ever-increasing food supply, led them to turn against and kill most of the remaining Leaver tribes to better make way for their own expansion. Quinn sites this event as the real meaning behind the Cain and Abel story, as told by the surviving Leavers who witnessed the Taker expansion. Even more astounding is that he uses this conflict to explain how the Biblical story of Genesis is, in fact, a historical retelling of the “fall” of the Taker people, as seen through the eyes of their victims. Quinn acknowledges that a small number of Leaver tribes still exist today (namely the Bushmen of Africa, the Alawa of Australia, and the Kreen-Alore of Brazil) who continue to live in harmony and accordance with their environment. The relatively small number of these people aside, Quinn claims a majority of the humans living today, particularly in Industrial societies, are of the Taker mindset—meaning they go about their lives with the belief that they’re entitled to plunder the world’s resources and life-forms to better suit their needs, and do so even at the cost of the planet’s, and their own, destruction. Quinn goes on to accuse Mother Culture—which he describes as being the “mythological vision of our culture that the world was made for man, who belongs to an order of being separate from and higher than the rest of the community” (The Ishmael Community)—for fostering this belief through religion, the biased philosophies our ancestors passed down to us, and, more recently, media influence. Quinn concludes that the survival of the planet depends on our breaking free from this ingrained perception, and to see ourselves not as the “final product” of this universe, but as the first in a long line of evolving creatures who will, one day, share an intelligence equal to or greater than our own. Ultimately, says Quinn, our responsibility as stewards of this planet is to ensure that evolution continues unhindered, which can only happen if we start living in accordance with the delicate ecosystems of the planet, instead of placing ourselves above and beyond it.

It’s interesting stuff, and definitely a departure from the typical theological interpretation, which makes for a good read, but does it really hold water? After all, with the exception of Riane Eisler (whose own work, The Chalice and the Blade, has met with considerable opposition), Quinn doesn’t site any other sources to back up his claims. It’s a potentially lethal endeavor of which, at the very least, can make for a skeptical reader.
Though the lack of evidence opens his theories up to considerable debate, he does make a fascinating argument; after all, one doesn’t need to look far to find the Taker lifestyle in action. Hell, just a peek in the mirror is all it really takes because, let’s face it, kids, America is the epitome of the Taker lifestyle. Love us or hate us, we are the world’s single most powerful driving force behind the unicultural globalization sweeping the planet. By ramming our materialistic obsessiveness down the rest of the world’s throat we help to ensure diversity and natural resources are at a minimum and corporate profits are at a maximum. And though we may be leading the world towards gazillion dollar profits, we’re also leading this planet to a most certain destruction. America has the highest per capital consumption of, well, just about everything: oil, natural gas, wood, copper, lead, zinc, tin, aluminum, rubber (U.S.G.S). Though we only make up 6% of the world’s population, we consume 30% of its resources. And what we give back in return sure doesn’t help much either; we’re talking pollution up the wazoo with over 18% of greenhouse emissions coming from the U.S. alone (Dickson), and so much toxic waste that we have to ship it overseas.

Always in pursuit if that American Dream, people in the U.S. love to showcase their Takerism by building monstrous houses to rival the ancient castles and fortresses of yesteryear, and nowhere else in the world will you find as many gas-guzzling S.U.V.s and other colossal-mobiles as you would here in the States. As Quinn so elegantly explains: “White or colored, male or female, what the people of this culture want is to have as much wealth and power in the Taker prison as they can get. They don’t give a damn that it’s a prison and they don’t give a damn that it’s destroying the world...naturally a well-run prison must have a prison industry...consuming the world...it takes their minds off the boredom and futility of their lives” (251-53). And boy is it a finely tuned industry at that; just turn on the telly and it’s right there: drive a $40,000 Ford truck and you own the great outdoors, baby. Mother Culture isn’t one for subtlety, I guess.

But, despite his lack of evidence, Quinn, somehow, manages to pull it off. Perhaps my only real gripe is with the narrator, himself, who tends to come off sounding like a complete idiot just about any and every time he opens his mouth. When practically every response he makes is along the lines of, “I’m afraid I just don’t get it,” and, “God, I have no idea,” or, my personal favorite, “So?” Time and again the man’s stupidity left me with an overwhelming desire to reach through the pages and strangle the irritating oaf. Even Ishmael was prompted to accuse him of forgetting “to take your brainy pill this morning” (154). Granted, the bumbling bozo does experience a certain amount of enlightenment at the end, but it doesn’t make him any more likable. Maybe this was Quinn’s
attempt at humor, or trying to provide the reader (who may be struggling to assimilate the teachings) with someone he can relate to, but I felt he could have endowed the dunce with just a wee bit more brainpower. I mean, if this is the kind of guy that’s supposed to save the world, then God help us. More than once does Ishmael, himself, appear to question his choice of student, as evidenced by his exasperated, albeit colorful retorts: “Of course you [know]. You’re just playing dumb” (46). Ever the sanctimonious prophet, that gorilla.

Irritating characters aside, the only other issue I had with the book revolved around the author’s conclusions...or lack thereof. Though Quinn does a good job of showing the illustrious reader the errors of his ways, he doesn’t offer any concrete solutions on how we’re supposed to go about solving the problems. He gives us the “laws of nature” for which we must abide by to ensure the survival of one and all, but not how to go about enacting such laws in an era where high-rises, the stock market, and Snoop Doggy Dog reign supreme. Even after I read through it again a second time, I still felt like I had been left dangling at the end of some breathtaking crescendo that I’d been led to believe would somehow guide me to the ultimate pinnacle of the human potential. I felt—dare I say it—almost cheated. But Ishmael’s only response when posed with a “what now?” question was to “spread the word.” That may have worked in the past, but in an age of the Two-Minute-Attention-Span, and the overwhelming media onslaught wailing on our senses at every turn, word of mouth just isn’t what it used to be. What really makes me wonder, though, is how Quinn could devote over ten years of his life to making this book, and yet, after all this time, couldn’t come up with a more concrete answer. Despite his ambiguous conclusions—and perhaps because of them—Quinn furthered defined his vision of the book’s impact during an interview with the reply that “In about 30 years, things will begin to happen...Ishmael will be forgotten. Daniel Quinn will be forgotten. But the fact that a whole generation read this book will change the way people see things. I liken it to Sigmund Freud; nowadays his ideas are commonplace; they’ve changed the way we live” (du Bow). That’s all good and well, but who’s to say we’ll even be around long enough to witness this revolution. Why wait? What we need is something to get us started now.

Well, you’ve been forewarned. So, if you’re looking for step-by-step instructions on how to go about saving the world, you won’t get them. You will, however, get an eye-opening and entirely different take on some of our culture’s most valued beliefs. And though you may not be given all the answers, you could find yourself with a whole new perspective on life, and the part you play in it. And maybe that’s all we really need to bring about the changes necessary. Perhaps, with that in mind, we can better understand some of Ishmael’s final words: “You’re an inventive people, aren’t you? You pride yourselves on that don’t you?...then invent.”
The director has the most work out of any person involved in the process of creating a movie: from the translation of the screen play into the visual actions and pictures on film, to the directing of actors to achieve the goals of the movie. The requirements of a good movie are that the story must have a goal, and to have events strung together to achieve the goal of the movie which completes the story that is to be told. David Mamet teaches just that in his book titled “On Directing Film”. This book is said to be a commonly assigned book in film classes, which is easy to understand because it gives much insight into the art of directing. All the many aspects of directing are talked about—from the common assumptions that directors will make in conveying ideas from the written play to the visual one, to the way the actors are used to show a story through their actions and words. Because of his way of thinking past the obvious, this book contains information that is useful for directing and creating playwrights to keep the audience wanting more, instead of thinking of it as a bore.

Throughout the book, which is written from dialogues in film classes, the author Mamet talks with a student of his about the ideas presented from the written play in order to translate them into visual actions on film. One of the many interesting ways he accomplishes to show earliness is by using a doorknob rather than a predictable clock. One of his students suggested using a clock and was replied with “As Stanislavsky told us, we shouldn’t shy away from things just because they are cliches. On the other hand, maybe we can do better. Maybe the clock ain’t bad, but let’s put it aside for a moment just because our mind, that lazy dastard, jumped to it first and, perhaps, it is trying to betray us.” The idea of using a doorknob came to light as a good way to show earliness by having the door be locked before the student’s class started. The way Mamet said the door knob idea was better made a lot of sense “Not more exciting in general, but more exciting as applied to the idea of earliness.” This is because of how the door knob resembles the students desire to get to class early, and that he is early- both of which were part of the main purpose of that cut. Mamet’s way of showing the simple thoughts on how to accomplish this task as being an uninteresting stepping stone to the flavorful ideas which flow to keep the interest in the viewer’s eye, and yet to get to the goal of the movie- the plot.

The dramatic structure of the movie is the main content of the story that the movie is trying to convey by the use of actors. The reflection
of ideas that Mamet provides for the dramatic structure to complete the story is very useful to keep the attention of the viewer. The story of a movie must be shown to complete the purpose of the movie, but the most important aspect of movie making is keeping the viewer’s attention, and this is what Mamet tries to find a balance between, until the completion of the story. Mamet says that it is important to use the anagram K.I.S.S. Keep It Simple Stupid. This is supposed to keep the viewers attention, “How do we keep their attention? Certainly not by giving them more information—by withholding. If you keep the viewer’s interest, and complete the story you have made a good movie. The movie is for the viewer, if you don’t understand the purpose of a scene, chances are that the viewer won’t. This concept is best shown through Mamet’s words: “They are like you—they are human beings: if it don’t mean something to you, it ain’t going to mean something to them”. Through his book “On Directing Film” he will convey just that, the main parts of a movie that makes it worth watching. Also his way of trying ideas and using them in a way that works for the cut, shows what most directors think of.

Trying to show a story through actions, while keeping it simple enough for the majority of viewers to understand, and follow may not be as simple as it seems. Mamet’s ideas on this is what keeps many people interested in his screen lays, and continues to keep people watching his movies such as “House of Games”, “Things Change”, and “Wag The Dog” for which he co-wrote the screen play for. This book is a must read for people on the quest of learning about screen play wrighting, film, and directing. It continues to make people think about situations critically to better the world of film.
Have you ever thought about what it would be like to live your life being told what you can do, when, where, and how you can do it? Never really knowing what it is like to be able to think for yourself, and be free to move about the country as you please. Before reading this book, *Prison Writing in the 20th-century America*, I had never thought of convicts as real people. I just assumed that they were all there for good reason, and thought they were best kept out of society’s way. Out of sight out of mind, right? Prison’s systems primary goal should be to rehabilitate their inhabitants to the best ability of the state. I was shocked to read that not all prison’s had libraries. A chance for a motivated inmate to learn, so eventually when and if the inmate returns to society, they wouldn’t be in the dark, and might have a chance at contributing something to society as everybody should contribute something. This in turn would decrease the odds of that inmate perpetuating their old ways. This would Lower the state’s repeat offender rate, and provide society with another contributing constituent. After reading this book I really feel like there needs to be change in the system.

*Prison Writing in 20th-century America*, is an anthology of writings from convicts or ex-convicts. Some of these authors you may have heard about and others that were totally unknown. In the earlier years of the century, prison writings were restricted and often forbidden. When I think of a prison inmate, I immediately think of Machine gun Kelly or other Dick Tracy characters. My point here is that I wouldn’t think of any inmate as someone who could be teaching a college level English course. Some of these people are great writers, and some of the brightest thinkers of the 20th-century. Granted they must have done something in the past that would constitute them being in jail. But Malcom X turned out to be quite the philosopher, with his writing from another work, “The ballot or the bullet” and his famous phrase “by any means necessary”. He fights for civil rights, and is widely known for his advocating of civil rights through leadership in that movement.

Some of the most interesting bits from the book come before each of the writings, where the editor, Bruce franklin, gives a quick
preface to each individual author. Sometimes he explains why that inmate is in prison, or he gives a quick biography of the convict’s life. In some cases it makes the reader feel a little sympathy towards that convict.

With the “state raised” convict, or the convict who “grows up from boyhood to manhood in penal institutions” (193). Jack Henry Abbott is a “state raised” man. After reading Franklin’s preface and then the following writings, I felt truly bad for his situation. He came from a broken home and at the age of nine he did his first stretch in juvenile hall for the offense of failure to adapt to foster care life. Things snowballed from there. His failure to adapt to prison life is basically what kept him in prison for most of his life. He refused to be “indoctrinated”. What he means when he says indoctrination, is that you, as the inmate, believe that you being there, “is a result of your “ill behavior”, that it is self inflicted. So I feel bad for him because he was oppressed his entire life by these people who wanted him to be someone that he is not. It takes courage to stand up for your individuality. It’s a lot easier to do so when you are free, let alone in a controlled environment, such as prison.

Jack Henry Abbott is a prime example that our penal system needs a thorough cleansing, and a lot of change. If rationality was used in determining the sentence looking back historically on his life there is no doubt in my mind that he would have been in prison for so long. The State had a man’s lifetime to rehabilitate Abbott. Do they mean to tell us that at the age of nine Abbott was already beyond rehabilitation? It seems a little far fetched to me.

Prison is a very mean and violent place. I am not saying that a lot of inmates do deserve anything better. Some of the inmates are incarcerated for small time stuff and just from being in that environment are molded into these vengeful criminals. In the prison, Pelican Bay, they have a special housing unit where thirteen hundred men are in a “state program of torture and governmental terrorism”(355). Some prisoners are not taking it anymore and filing suits against their prison. It is so bad that some news programs are beginning to take notice.

Every time I picked up the book I had trouble putting it down. That is the kind of reading I love. It just seemed so interesting to me to hear what some of these people had to say. Hearing it straight from the people that lived the lives that movies are made from. Although it would be a huge job, I think if we can change the prison system even just a little, so these bright, and intelligent people might have the opportunity to contribute more of what we get from Prison Writing in the 20th-century, then we would all be better off.
Romance? Bah!
A Reasoning for the Seasoning (or not)
of a Story
by Katie Holman

Brown Girl, Brownstones
310 pp. New York:
First Feminist Press.

As a period documentation and examination of family dynamics, Paule Marshall’s Brown Girl, Brownstones succeeds. It does not, however, emotionally engage me past a point. Marshall’s novel recounts the financial and emotional struggles of a Barbadian family in America during the Depression and World War II. Her characters are complex and interesting, but the book does a pseudo-romantic metamorphosis after I’ve allowed myself to become absorbed in it, and here Marshall loses my good regard. Had the novel been less engaging to begin with, I might write it off entirely; as is, this flaw only detracts from my enjoyment of the book.

Brown Girl, Brownstones is set in Brooklyn, 1939. Selina is “a ten-year-old girl with scuffed legs and a body as straggly as the clothes she [wears].” Her mother is bitterly clawing her way to financial stability—a small vein of power; her father is a dapper, happy-go-lucky sort. Her sister Ina remains rather unimportant from beginning to end. Marshall’s focus on family ties—first on the relationship between Selina and her father, later on that of Selina and the mother; and throughout, on Silla and Deighton’s failed love—is a large part of what makes this story.

Silla, the mother, works long factory hours to support her family. She and her husband Deighton have only the remnants of romantic love: “Perhaps, tonight, with the heat and the thick night it would be right again. He would open the door between their bedroom and the sun parlor so that they could see the sky with its low stars from the bed. He might find the words tonight to bring trust again to her eyes; his hands might arouse that full and awesome passion they once had...” It is obvious that something monumental tore them apart, and just what that was is never fully revealed, though it has the scent of betrayal, of changed priorities.
Deighton is wistful, thinking of Silla, and yet the trust between them has clearly been broken. Their relationship is sad, now, and that is evident to, and even felt vicariously by, the reader. Marshall’s portrayal of Deighton as openly rueful contrasts sharply with the hard face affected by the mother. Silla conveys her anger at the broken trust between them in everything she does. “This time her reply was to plunge her hand into the chicken she was cleaning and with one savage wrench lay the viscid clay-yellow entrails into the sink... Suddenly her anger was tempered by bewilderment. ‘But be-Jesus-Christ, what kind of man is you, nuh?’ She jerked her head away and seemed to address someone else in the room, ‘But what kind of man is he, nuh? Here every Bajan is saving if it’s only a dollar a week and buying a house and wun save a penny. He ain got nothing and ain looking to get nothing...’ ” In truth, I feel that Deighton doesn’t know how to go about getting what it is that he needs; and part of that is his wife, his family, and the sheltered love that might motivate him to provide for them... Silla bewilders him, and yet he understands her, but she will not—cannot—let him in to break her again. They are caught up in the harsh revolution that only two people who once loved in peace, and love still in pain, wretchedly, can feel.

Selina is one of those rare children who is born with some part of herself complete:

A haze of sunlight seeping down from the skylight through the dust and dimness of the hall caught her wide full mouth, the small but strong nose, the eyes set deep in the darkness of her face. They were not the eyes of a child. Something too old lurked in their centers. They were weighted, it seemed, with scenes of a long life. She might have been old once, and now, miraculously, young again—but with the memory of that other life intact. She seemed to know the world down there in the dark hall and beyond for what it was. Yet knowing, she still longed to leave this safe, sunlit place at the top of the house for the challenge there. (4).

Her entirely separate relationships with both parents are the center of this piece, and, in some cases, what brings their relationship to light. Brown Girl, Brownstones uses Selina’s experiences as a means of examining every aspect of Barbadian society in New York, as well as to compare what is with what comes to be. Selina is the child with the clean slate—the one who could do anything—and whose upbringing and emotional encounters with the world leave her, finally, in perhaps the same position the mother occupies.

Marshall does well with the Selina of metaphors, the Selina of feelings meant to be understood—made in essence, for the everyman—
until Selina falls in love. Here, she loses my interest entirely, for after the trying and entirely emotional—which is not to say functional or whole—love of Silla and Deighton, Selina’s romantic relationship seems paltry and worthless. Her lover is a young Barbadian man several years her senior. He is neither emotionally beautiful nor socially functional, and he feels to me unworthy of Selina’s devotion—which, in fact, has no depth to speak of. Selina and Clive share only the warmth of sexual exploration and someone to cling to. How cheap! How worthless! Such a way to waste the time that might be spent living the life that is perhaps open to passionate love! I am saddened to irritation by this thoroughly anti-climatic denouement... from strong expressions of purity to easy bits of fluff goes Marshall, and her novel never recovers.

It is here that I begin to wonder what her purpose might be... and I suppose (as the afterword speculates) that this relationship means to signify her adulthood, and finally, in its conclusion, return her once more to a world of solitary confinement; but Marshall fails here, for I can no longer see into her character’s mind. Selina becomes to me, as well, a stranger. Perhaps this is a clever way of segregating Selina, even from the reader, to further express the loneliness she is destined to feel, but for Marshall to do so at this late date would be to entirely modify the open, upfront style that so benefited her novel in its beginnings. I cannot help but feel that here Marshall has lost her stride, and that I, in turn, have lost my empathy for her characters.
In Margaret Atwood’s book *Morning in the Burned House* she describes death as seen through the eyes of a puritan woman being hanged: “Death sits on my shoulder like a crow / waiting for my squeezed beet / of a heart to burst / so he can eat my eyes” (Atwood 62). The whole book is filled with uniquely shocking visions of life and exposes gruesome realities that conjure up feelings of bitterness, but also of admiration. This is not a book for the weak hearted. There is no flowery poetry in here, but it is exceptionally beautiful and emotionally engaging. The precise language is directed with skill to invoke reactions from the reader on all levels. The author’s descriptions of events and personal opinions are brutal in their honesty—vulgar and condescending at times when addressing the reader with powerful declarations—but the strong visions and charged skepticism contain elements of wit and experience that give the poems a passionate visceral quality. To dig one’s teeth into the book is to “...eat flowers and dung...” (Atwood 68), and to become more well acquainted with Atwood’s other peculiar tasting phrases. The most defining characteristic of the book is that Atwood involves her readers, and you cannot help but feel the emotions she inspires through the personalized voices she uses.

One of the most powerful poems in the book is “Half-Hanged Mary.” This poem spans over a little more than eleven pages and is subtitled with an epigraph that tells the reader it is about a real puritan woman who was hanged for suspicion of witchcraft in Massachusetts and survived through the night. Like all the work in the book, the poem seems personal and intimate as you read it. The speaker is Mary as she hangs and the stanzas drift through different times of the night and the thoughts and feelings ensuing. The first stanza begins with “Rumor was loose in the air / hunting for some neck to land on” (Atwood 58). Atwood starts many of her poems with a powerfully painted picture and a condescending voice. All of the poetry maintains a quality of being something you can taste and feel (and some of the time you do not want to taste or feel what it is that is pushed in your face). Of course the more intense the poetry gets the more it is obvious that it is real and full of life—which includes all that good stuff like dynamite, manure, a kiss here and there, and burning hearts on skewers. The next section of the poem delivers a differently toned but
equally sardonic opening: “The rope was an improvisation. / With time they’d have thought of axes” (Atwood 59). The voice is mocking and powerful, full of conviction and strength. Atwood’s poems take hold of a story or theme and expose the innards. The inner voices of the characters and their emotions are given life through her words.

Beautiful memories and nostalgic moments are plentiful in the poems of the book. Re-occurring places, animals, ideas, and feelings are constantly appearing in the descriptive stories. A cabin in the woods with a lake nearby is mentioned many times. It is obvious after a while that these references relate to Atwood’s childhood, and are connected to the memory of her father. Besides these places, certain animals like foxes and owls occur numerous times throughout the book as entities that embody some power for Atwood. A witch-like feeling surrounds you when you read, “She might have saved herself / with her white owl’s voice / but we cut parts off her first” (Atwood 71) from the poem “Owl Burning.” There is also a powerful sexual voice at times, which reveals her passionate nature. Such a variety of voices and themes ensue in fact, that to place Atwood’s poems in a category of writing would be a futile endeavor. What would be more useful is to acknowledge that her choice of approaches to subjects is unique and effective, enough to make you feel giddy, humorous, beautiful, uneasy, or even guilty as you read the book. In a poem called “Cell” she compares humans to cancer cells in nature: “Such desires / are not unknown. Look in the mirror” (Atwood 48). In the same poem however, she mentions the cancer cells as being beautiful and admirable in their appearance and life. These odd combinations of feelings come and go throughout the book, giving varying perspectives on the same subject or theme. The negative is always intertwined with the positive, life intertwined with death, love with hate, and everything else is meshed together with the same all encompassing language and voice. As in life, no feeling displayed in the book is usually done with one emotion, but instead a mad twirling of many—and Atwood does this eloquently to create a uniquely structured book of poems.

In “The Secular Night” the ending of the poem painfully reads: “Outside there are sirens. / Someone’s been run over. / The century grinds on” (Atwood 7). It seems depressing aesthetically. Upon reading it again though, one might start to realize how this ending is more like a brutal acceptance of a continuum, capturing a precise moment and then unforgivably leaving it behind with “The century grinds on,” just like time does, despite the atrocity or catastrophe taking place. In this way what sounds negative at first actually just makes light of some harsh reality about life and does not give it too much emphasis. The writing will sometimes point out the worst and than shrugs it off as fact, moving in some new direction—moving on as life must.

Cumulatively, the book compiles emotional explosions and reveries in an almost story-like fashion from beginning to end. The first lines of the
first poem “You Come Back” begins with, “You come back into the room / where you’ve been living / all along. You say...” (Atwood 3). The first poem and its title introduce the reader to a voice that speaks to the reader and makes him/her a part of the poem. The voice Atwood often uses to address the reader is almost intimidating. She writes entire poems addressing the reader as” “You” and makes them feel like she is talking about them—what they feel, what they have done, what they want. You are not in control of what you feel when you read these poems, Atwood is at the helm and you must trust that wherever she is taking you that you will not be left behind or wounded too much to continue. In “Cressida to Troilus: A Gift,” Atwood pierces the intended reader with” “Everything I gave was to get rid of you / as one gives to a beggar: There. Go Away” (Atwood 28). Whoever this poem is meant for is obviously somebody that no one who reads the book wants to be, but it is written as if directed at you. This makes the whole book exciting and fun to read, because you can count on being dragged into some realm you didn’t know existed—you may even become a character one of her personal stories.

Certainly at some moments, there is no doubt about the message of a poem or at least its insinuations. This is displayed in “A Man Looks,” where a man in a wheel chair whose sex and physical feeling are incapacitated is angered inside because of his loss of manly awareness and connection with the woman trying to help him through the door. Whether she is his wife or nurse is not emphasized as much as his feeling of anger and frustration with the event. It is as if in losing his sexual charge he is no longer who he was all his life, a man who in seeing a woman’s legs would normally have had a thousand feelings. The man has become “luggage” to the woman; a thing to be polite to and respect until it dies and that is about it. Themes like this occur often in the book and one must be able to stomach it and extract the value in such fiery speech and subject matter.

The poetry as a whole creates a dreamlike world of imagery and meaning. The poetry in the book drifts in and out of personal experience and larger topics, consistently involving the reader in the poetry by talking “to him/her directly. Morning in the Burned House is involved and complex. It has very surreal moments, like when describing dreams of the death of the author’s father, and it has very real moments as well—like when she brings flowers to his bedside and so many feelings come to her. Reading into issues of gender, love, and grief very deeply, the poems take on a worldly perspective and relate personal experience to the whole. Everything from war and bloodied battlefields to tossing wineglasses in the fireplace and having carefree sex is described vigorously in this unique work. Atwood’s poetry is a combination of the emotional and the powerful that deserves a look from anyone with the desire to be bombarded with beautiful language and to become personally involved in what they read.
As I sit here in the cold morning kitchen with my black coffee contemplating Kicking Tongues by Karen King Aribisala, I can’t help but ask myself, where is God when you need him (or her)? When I was a young oblivious chap I used to believe that the solutions to problems for just about everything, were in the toolbox of God. If my faith was kept as strong as a lion, my and other people’s problems would be resolved by God. In reality, my problems as a young boy consisted of fitting in at school, having been blessed with two devilish little sisters, and not being able to stay up late at night playing video games because it was bad for my biological clock. My pleas for help from up above were never answered. Today however, I see that my trivial problems of childhood do not measure up to complex social, political, and economic challenges facing many people around the world. In the case of Karen King Aribisala, she explores these very problems that her fellow countrymen of Nigeria live with in her fictional book Kicking Tongues. She pursues this challenge in a creative way, however. If this book was meant to awaken the world to Nigeria’s problems and lay the foundation for change, she falls short, and should enroll in Intro On How to Structure a Revolution 101 at the closest night school.

The book is a contemporary retelling of Geoffrey Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales that instead of taking place in thirteenth century England, takes place in modern day Nigeria. In the beginning a woman by the name “The Black Lady The” assembles various pissed off Nigerians for a journey(pilgrimage) from Lagos to the Capital City of Abuja to address various injustices. The narrator is “The Black Lady The” and she is the commander of the operation. During the journey she introduces each bus passenger with a never-ending poem, and allows them to tell their story to the rest of the group. The different people on the bus range from everything to a Female Police Superintendent, a Cook, to a Post Graduate English Major. They all are united for the same reason; discontent for the current Nigerian government and the smothering of their voices.

Throughout the book I could not help but feel pity for the passive passengers. Not for their supposed tragic stories of injustices, instead, for them having ride on a bus with “The Black Lady The” all day. She is the melancholy hostess of the journey that perpetually victimizes the
passengers with her judgmental poems. For example, “The Black Lady The” breaks into a poem about “The Journalist”. She writes:

Fee Fie Foe Fum  
I smell the blood  
Of a journalist man  
Whether he be alive  
Or whether he be dead  
I’ll grind his bones  
To make my bread

The format of the book is puzzling. What is it and where I am I? Exhausting spontaneous poems break out everywhere that steal the potential of the short stories the passengers are telling. The poems go on forever, like a congressional filibuster. I often found myself forcing my eyelids to stay open instead of submitting and letting them fall in hopes of discovering a line of that didn’t make my head go in circles. Then a short story would appear, capturing my interest, but then dissolve into another poem as quickly as it appeared. If this style was intended to personalize the passengers in order to draw in the reader, it doesn’t work. Instead, the passengers become a menu of generality and reason denied a microphone of their own.

In the end of the book “The Black Lady The”, a Born Again Christian, ponders the role of religion in herself and Nigeria. Before she dives into another poem about “The Pastor”, she thinks to herself, “I had always considered myself quite religious following by rote the things of God. But I desperately wanted to be spiritual, I mean, really at one with God, hoping and knowing vaguely that might be the key to the understanding, indeed the righting of our nation’s problems. Simplistic.... You might say”. Here, unexpectedly, a contrast to the previous pages of non stop rhetoric of individuality and unity as the antidote to Nigeria’s long list of problems, she throws in the twist of God. Then she asks “The Pastor”, “Do you believe that Nigeria, Africa, the Black Race, is under some sort of Biblical curse?” The prelude of religion and God downplays the ambition of empowering the passengers with a sense of commonness, and contradicts self confidence with conformity. Where is God’s glory and wisdom when you need it?

However, the last slice of the book is interesting. It is an imaginative account of the Prophet Isaiah being interviewed at the Nigerian Television Authority. The interviewer innocently challenges the Prophet Isaiah about the meaning of the Bible and its failure to include Nigeria in all of its profoundness. The interviewer asks, “Sir, this broadcast is going out nationwide! And I know that my people might perish for lack of this knowledge you have been so good to give us but I notice you still refer to God as coming from Israel. Why couldn’t he have been Nigerian?”
I ask myself, why was this book written? The whole thing could be mistaken for a personal diary or journal that miraculously ended up on the shelf of a bookstore, and in my hands. Some of the wide assortment of short slideshow glances of the passenger’s (messengers?) stories are well written and hold great potential for elaboration. However, the wholeness of the book had me wanting to close my eyes and sink into my own dreams. I will always cherish a book that sheds light where it is dark, but I need precision not ambiguous poetry. If tomorrow you wake up and see a tornado on a direct collision course for your house, don’t take this book with you when you head for the basement.